

THE  
CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS  
A SUFI ALLEGORY

*BEING AN ABRIDGED VERSION OF  
FARID-UD-DIN ATTAR'S MANTIQU-UT-TAYR*



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## FOREWORD

Farid-ud-din Attār occupies a prominent place in the roll of distinguished Persian poets. His most famous work on Sufism, written eight centuries ago, is the *Mantiq-ut-Tayr*, or the "Colloquy of the Birds," an allegorical poem in which the gifted mystic describes the quest of the Birds (symbolising Sufi pilgrims) for the Simurg (the Lord of Creation). A French translation of this great classic by M. Garcin de Tassy was published in Paris in the year 1863, but it has not yet been translated into English.

In the year 1910 a translation of a fragment of the poem, in which the poet describes the seven valleys through which the Sufi pilgrim has to make his way before he reaches the Divine presence, appeared in "The Porch," and was subsequently issued in leaflet form. This excerpt, however, gives no idea of the story, nor of the poet's flights of fancy and the charming imagery that distinguish his poem from all other Sufi works. I was eagerly awaiting a full translation of the poem by one of those English scholars who have rendered such splendid service to the cause of oriental studies by bringing within the reach of the English-speaking people many a gem of Persian literature, but as no such work has appeared and as I had a little leisure during my last voyage from Bombay to Venice, I thought I could apply it to no better purpose than the preparation of an abridged version of this great poem, which, dealing with a subject of perennial interest to mankind, has delighted and inspired successive generations of readers and will continue to do so, as long as divine philosophy kindles in the heart of men the fire of enthusiasm to rise on "stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things."

I should explain that I have omitted a good deal which I thought would not interest a foreign reader or would tend to obscure rather than illuminate the salient points of the discourse. I have also thought fit to give a free rather than literal translation of the selected passages, so that the work may be of interest to the casual reader as well as to the student of spiritual and mystic lore.

In these days of restless struggle and haste when the thoughts of men are directed towards a practical solution of the bewildering difficulties into which the world has been plunged by the great war, a work on a system of philosophy identified with metaphysical speculation and stagnation calls for a word of explanation, if not of apology. The highest intelligences in all parts of the globe are to-day striving to gain a clear understanding of the terrible unrest that has everywhere unhinged the minds of the people and to devise means for combating the forces of disruption that threaten to overturn the established order of things. The crying need of the hour is virile action, not sterile speculation. We want powerful stimulants to rouse up every individual to do his best for the regeneration of the world, not soothing drafts to induce the slumber of spiritualism and quietism.

What, then, is the justification for a book on Sufism in such stirring times? The justification lies in the fact that mysticism like other systems of religious philosophy has an ideal as well as a practical side. If it leads some to passivity, or lures them to the realms of fancy, it also quickens others to rise above the plane of common life and come in closer touch with the reality of things. The exalted doctrines and high principles for which it stands sustain alike those who long for a life of spiritual peace and those who are ready to face the stern struggles of an active life. Worthless, indeed, would

be these tenets and precepts for the ascent of man should they break down when subjected to the pressure of events such as those through which society is now passing.

Self-renunciation is the be-all and end-all of Sufism, but it must not be confounded with renunciation of the world. Sufism does not call upon its initiates to leave the world. It rather exhorts them to plunge themselves in it and in the universe at their gates and to know their mutual relations. This knowledge cannot come from without by comprehension. It can only be attained from within by self-mergence. Therefore, the Sufi has to go through certain stages of training and preparation. The vital principle of this self-discipline is the purification of the senses and of the will. To purify the senses is to liberate them from the thralldom of egocentric judgment and to make them organs of clear and unclouded perception. This done, the Sufi's heart becomes a mirror on which the full perfection of Divinity can be reflected. The traveller on the Path then energises upon new planes where he sees more clearly, hears more intensely and feels more vividly than before. After this it is not a very difficult matter for him to surrender his "I-hood" and to subjugate his affections and will. He is now the *Sikandar* (Alexander) of his time, for he has built a solid wall between his pure self and the Gog and Magog of passions and desires. He feels that the rhythm of his life is in tune with the rhythm of the Universal Life, beholds the world from a new angle of vision and discerns eternal beauty and eternal serenity beneath apparent deformity and apparent inhumanity. The dreadful phantoms of passion and prejudice, distrust and discord vanish like mists and new light, new colour, new fragrance, new music thrill every nerve with indescribable joy.

During his journey on the spiritual path a Sufi

is apt to lose self-control and to indulge in excesses. Many an ardent pilgrim has gone astray owing to such loss of control, but that is no reason why others should fight shy of the pilgrimage. If some enthusiasts have brought ridicule on themselves and on the cause by pushing the doctrines of abstinence, love and charity to excess, they have at least left to humanity a warning against the perils of the modern tendency towards a preponderance of the opposite qualities of worldliness, selfishness and self-indulgence. A study of Sufism will thus help us in this materialistic age to steer clear of the arid rocks of egotism while avoiding the engulfing whirlpools of nihilism. The world would indeed be at all times much the better for a little infusion of the exalted devotion of mystics like Mirabai or Muktabai, or of the quietism of Rabi'ah or Madame Guyon, or the transcendentalism of Maulana Rumi or Schelling, or the ecstatic exultation of Mansur Hallaj or Master Eckhart, or of the mystical compulsion of Joan of Arc or Florence Nightingale.

Another aspect of the study of mysticism should not be lost sight of. There is no branch of Oriental or European thought the study of which promotes a better understanding between East and West than mysticism. It removes many a veil of separation that keeps the different races apart from one another and therefore also apart from God, and makes them realize their essential unity beneath superficial diversity. It may be hoped, therefore, that a deeper and more widespread knowledge of the attractive philosophy and lofty ideals of Sufism, which is at once the religious philosophy and popular religion of Islam, will not fail to induce that spirit of love and charity which neither fears nor loathes as alien communities of different colour or creed, but knits them in closer bonds of union as sons of the same family and sharers of the same destiny.

Before I conclude, it is my pleasant duty to express my obligations to those to whom I am indebted for this excursion into Sufi philosophy. It revives grateful memories of the late Professor Mirza Hairat of the Elphinstone College, Bombay—poet, scholar and philosopher—at whose feet I took my first lessons in Sufism. My warm acknowledgments are also due to those Persian and English authors whose works have been my constant companions on the mystic path, particularly to Mr. E. R. Whinfield and Dr. Reynold Nicholson. In giving illustrations from the works of Maulana Rumi, Jami, Shabistari and Hajwari, I have freely availed myself of the excellent English translations of their writings by these learned authors and my readers will, no doubt, agree that I could not have done better.

R. P. MASANI.

*15th June 1923.*

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE ON PERSIAN MYSTICISM.

"I AM GOD."

*"Ana al-Haqq"*, "I am the Truth", proclaimed Mansur Hallaj, the Persian mystic. "The Truth" is one of the ninety-nine names of the Creator as enumerated in the Quran. The Sufis prefer it to all the others, as it indicates a wider conception of Deity than the "Allah" of the Quran.

To-day this conception of personal deification is the fixed pole of theosophy and theology alike. It was not so, however, in the days of Mansur. The devout followers of Islam who heard him indulge in such an utterance looked upon it as rank heresy. This, moreover, was not the only charge of blasphemy brought against him; it was alleged that he dared to preach the doctrines of incarnation, "return" or re-incarnation, and anthropomorphism and that while he himself claimed to be an incarnation of God, he declared that his disciples were incarnations of the prophets. To one he would say "Thou art Noah", to another "Thou art Moses", to a third "Thou art Muhammad", adding "I have caused their spirits to return to your bodies." How could Muslim orthodoxy tolerate such conceits? What if the preacher were a renowned ascetic, a learned saint, and a master of miracles? Perish he must ere his nefarious gospel should unhinge the minds of the faithful. He was therefore arrested under the orders of the Khalifah of Baghdad and thrown into prison, after having been fastened for a while (though not with nails) to a cross or gibbet, first on one and then on the other side of the Tigris, in the presence of the soldiers of the guard. For nine years his fate trembled in the

balance until he was put to death in the year 922 A. D., and what a terrible execution it was! History records no more gruesome instance of manslaughter; after he had been scourged with a thousand stripes, his hands were cut off and then the feet; next his eyes were torn from their sockets, the tongue that had dared to utter such calumnies against God and His apostles was then cut out, and last of all his head severed from the body. Even this was not enough to appease the infuriated spectators; their rage subsided only after the mangled corpse had been burned to ashes and thrown into the waters of the Tigris. But lo! report has it that the blood which gushed forth during the ghastly slaughter transcribed on the ground the very words *Ana al-Huqq*.

Mansur Hallaj fell a martyr to his faith—a faith that embraces nothing more than the one living truth animating the hearts of mystics in all ages and in all parts of the world. The Persian saints and mystical poets, therefore, constantly refer to his sayings and almost deify him. Al-Ghazali, the “Proof of Islam”, excuses him in his *Mishkat-ul-Anwar* on the ground that he took this liberty out of excessive love to God. By means of allegorical interpretation he likens Mansur’s saying to expressions such as these in the Quran: “I am he whom I love, and he whom I love is I.” “We are as two souls in one body. When ye see me ye see him and when ye see him ye see me.” Farid-ud-din Attar speaks of him in his *Memoirs of the Saints* as that “martyr of God in the way of God”, “that lion of the thicket of the search after Truth,” and “that diver into the tempestuous sea.” Jalal-ud-din Rumi, “the glory of religion”, entered his protest against Mansur’s execution in the following couplet:

“Whene’er an unjust judge controls the pen,  
Some Mansur dies upon the gibbet then.”

In the fifth book of the *Masnavi* he offers the following explanation of Mansur's words:—

"O prattler, Mansur's "I am He" was a deep mystic saying.  
Expressing union with the light, not mere incarnation."

Again, in his *Diwan* we find him defending Mansur in the following verses:—

"Ere there was a garden and vine and grape in the world.  
Our soul was intoxicated with immortal wine.  
In the Baghdad of Eternity we proudly were proclaiming  
'I am God',  
Before the tumult and mystery of Mansur.  
Ere this image of the spirit became a builder on water  
and clay,  
Our life was founded in the tavern of celestial truth."

In fact, before Mansur, whose grandfather is said to have been a Zoroastrian, King Jamshid had expressed the same belief in very similar terms. So, too, Bayazid Bistami, an earlier Muslim mystic, who also is believed to have been a descendant of the ancient Zoroastrian race, had given expression to the same idea, but in much more emphatic and vehement language. Here is an interesting account of the spiritual transports of this saint, as given in the fourth book of the *Bible of Persia*, the *Masnavi* of Maulana Rumi:

"Once that famous saint Bayazid came to his disciples,  
Saying, *Lo, I myself am God Almighty*;  
That man of spiritual gifts being visibly beside himself,  
Said, '*There is no God beside me; worship me*';  
Next morning when his ecstatic state had passed,  
They said, 'You said so and so, which was impious.'  
He answered, 'If I do so again,  
Straightway slay me with your knives:  
God is independent of me; I am in the body.  
If I say that again you must kill me.'  
When that holy person had given this injunction,  
Each of his disciples made ready his knife.  
Again that overflowing cup became beside himself,  
And his recent injunctions passed from his mind.  
Alienation came upon him, reason went astray,  
The dawn shone forth and his lamp paled at its light.

When the eagle of alienation from self took wing,  
 Bayazid began to utter similar speeches ;  
 The torrent of madness bore away his reason,  
 And he spoke more impiously than before.  
*'Within my vesture is naught but God,  
 Whether ye seek him on earth or in Heaven.*  
 His disciples all became mad with horror,  
 And struck with their knives at his holy body.  
 Each one, like the assassins of Kardkoh,  
 Without fear aimed at the body of his chief.  
 Each who aimed at the body of the Shaikh,  
 His stroke was reversed and wounded the striker.  
 No stroke took effect on that man of spiritual gifts,  
 But the disciples were wounded and drowned in blood.  
 Each who had aimed a blow at his neck,  
 Saw his own throat cut, and gave up the ghost ;  
 He who had struck at his breast,  
 Had cleft his own breast and killed himself."

What this miracle means, and from what spiritual plane the saint must have given expression to the beliefs which he himself condemned while on the terrestrial plane, may be left to the adepts to explain. For our present purpose we may consider a few more specimens of the same ecstatic exposition of the Sufi's self.

In the *Gulshan i Raz*, Shabistari gives the following answer to the question, "To what fruit belongs the aphorism 'I am the Truth'?"

"Verily, '*I am the Truth*' is a revelation of absolute mystery ;\*

Save 'The Truth', who can say 'I am the Truth' ?  
 All the atoms of the world, like Mansur,  
 You will take to be drunken and heavy with wine ;  
 Continually are they singing this song of praise,  
 Continually dwelling on this mystic verity.

When you have carded 'self' as cotton,  
 You, like the wool-carder, will raise this cry.  
 Take out the cotton of your illusion from your ears,

---

\* Similarly, the essence of the true Vedanta religion is embodied in the following couplet:—

"God is Truth, the world is a delusion ;  
 The individual soul and the Brahman are identical."

Hearken to the call of The One, The Almighty.  
 This call is coming to you from '*The Truth*',  
 Why are you tarrying for the last day?  
 Come into the valley of Peace, for straightway  
 The bush will say to you, 'Verily, I am Allah'.  
 The saying '*I am The Truth*' was lawful for the bush,  
 Why is it unlawful in the mouth of a good man?

Every man who as a void is empty of self,  
 Re-echoes within him the cry 'I am The Truth';  
 He takes his eternal side, 'other' perishes,  
 Travelling, travel, and traveller all become One.  
 Incarnation and communion spring from 'other',  
 But very unity comes from the mystic journey.  
 That which is separate from '*The Truth*', is phenomenal  
 existence,

Neither does '*The Truth*' become a creature, nor is a  
 creature united with Allah.

Incarnation and communion are here impossible,  
 For duality in unity is clearly absurd."

Since the glory of *The Truth* admits no duality,  
 Jalal-ud-din sings:

"I am the Gospel, the Psalter, the Quran,  
 I am Uzza and Lat - Bel and the Dragon,

Thou knowest what are fire, water, air and earth?

Fire, water, air and earth, all am I.

Lies and Truth, good, bad, hard and soft,

Knowledge, solitude, virtue, faith,

The deepest ground of hell, the highest torment of the  
 flames,

The highest paradise,

The earth and what is therein,

The angels and the devils, spirit and man am I.

What is the goal of speech, O tell it, Shamsi Tabrizi!

The goal of sense? This; the world-soul am I."

We hear a not-too-distant echo of this in the  
 following verses of the great American mystic,  
 Emerson:

"I am the owner of the sphere,

Of the seven stars and the solar year,

Of Caesar's hand and Plato's brain,

Of Lord Christ's heart and Shakespeare's strain".

In one of his odes Maulana Rumi re-echoes the  
 idea in the following verses:

"What is to be done, O Muslims? for I do not recognize myself,  
 I am neither Christian nor Jew, nor Gabr nor Muslim,  
 I am not of the east, nor of the west, nor of the land,  
 nor of the sea.  
 I am not of nature's mint, nor of the circling heavens.  
 I am not of earth, nor of water, nor of air, nor of fire;  
 I am not of the empyrean, nor of the dust, nor of existence, nor of entity,  
 I am not of India, nor of China, nor of Bulgaria, nor of Sagsin;  
 I am not of the kingdom of Iraqain, nor of the country of Khorasan,  
 I am not of this world, nor of the next, nor of Paradise, nor of Hell.  
 I am not of Adam, nor of Eve, nor of Eden and Rizwan.  
 My place is the placeless, my trace is the traceless,  
 'Tis neither body nor soul, for I belong to the soul of the Beloved,  
 I have put quality away, I have seen that the two worlds are one;  
 One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I call,  
*He is the first, he is the last, he is the outward. he is the inward;*  
 I know none other except 'Ya Hu' and 'Ya man Hu'.

This was the negative side of the poet's mystical exposition of his being. It is supplemented by an equally characteristic description of its positive side:

"If there be any lover in the world, O Muslims,—'tis I.  
 If there be any believer, infidel, or Christian hermit,—'tis I.  
 The wine-dregs, the cup-bearer, the minstrel, the harp, and the music,  
 The beloved, the candle, the drink and the joy of the drunken,—'tis I.  
 The two-and-seventy creeds and sects in the world  
 Do not really exist: I swear by God that every creed and sect—'tis I.  
 Earth and air and water and fire, knowest thou what they are?  
 Earth and air and water and fire, nay, body and soul too—'tis I.  
 Truth and Falsehood, good and evil, ease and difficulty from first to last,

Knowledge and learning and asceticism and piety and faith—'tis I.

The fire of Hell, be assured, with its flaming limbs,  
Yes, and Paradise and Eden and the Houris—'tis I.  
This earth and heaven with all that they hold,  
Angels, Peris, Genies and Mankind—'tis I".

For an exalted expression of the same idea one may turn to Abu Sa'id :—

"In my heart Thou dwellest—else with blood I'll drench it,  
In mine eye Thou glowest—else with tears I'll quench it.  
Only to be one with Thee my soul desireth,  
Else from out my body, by hook or crook, I'll wrench it."

### WITHDRAW INTO THYSELF.

As a man wishes to be, so shall he be. "Man is what he loves", said Augustine, and added: "If he loves a stone, he is a stone. If he loves a man, he is a man. If he loves God, I dare not say more, for if I said that he would then be God, ye might stone me."

It is easy for the mystic to revel in this belief, but difficult for an ordinary man to realize, impossible to explain it. However, an attempt may be made. What is mysticism? Lexicographers derive the word from the root *mu*, to close. Mysticism is, therefore, an equivalent of Platonic abstraction. A mystic is expected to close every avenue of sense-perception and to withdraw the mind into itself from all external objects, so as to render it worthy of receiving divine illumination. "Withdraw into thyself and the adytum of thine own soul will reveal to thee profounder secrets than the cave of Mithras."

This makes the Sufi's self-deification somewhat intelligible, but it rests on one hypothesis, *viz.*, that the spiritual element pervades sentient existence. As to this, the mystic of Persia has not the least doubt. What though religious divines have preached the alienation of man from the Creator, branding him as

a being conceived and born in sin and passing through the penitentiary of earthly life to atone for it? What if science pronounces him to be mere earthly clay and food for worms, at best a magnetic mockery? What if the sceptic is still enveloped in doubt, alarm, distrust? What if a cynic is forced to the conclusion that if man is at all an emanation from some spirit, that spirit cannot certainly be the Highest, Holiest, All-wise, All-just? Aye, what even if it appears to ordinary mortals with no philosophy of their own that some invisible butcher plays fast and loose with human life, choosing for his prey one helpless lamb to-day, another to-morrow, and so on, without intermission, during all the revolutions of this earth, and that the lives thus butchered are gone, and gone for ever? Unmindful of such spectres of honest doubt or positive disbelief, the unembarrassed mystic embraces the inspiring doctrine of man's divinity, and proceeds with the utmost confidence on the path leading to his beloved goal, communion with the universal soul, union with him, absorption in him.

### THE DOCTRINE OF ABSORPTION IN THE DEITY.

Vague idea this? It is, no doubt, very difficult to say whether the consummation for which those mystics yearned was infinite individual existence in the divine presence, exposed to no attack from within or without, and requiring nothing for its sustenance, the realm of eternal peace, some timeless, speechless, changeless state of tranquillity, or whether it was an entire fusion of soul in soul, complete absorption of all individual souls in one undiversified existence. We hear echoes of both in the literature of the Sufis, just as we do in Tennyson's "*In Memoriam*".

"That each, who seems a separate whole,  
Should move his rounds, and fusing all  
The skirts of self, again should fall

Remerging in the general soul,  
Is faith as vague as all unsweet."

It is for individual existence and identification after death that the soul longs. Despite serious misgivings, the poet believes:

"Eternal form shall still divide  
The eternal soul from all beside;  
And I shall know him when we meet."

This, however, is a preliminary meeting, preparatory to the final end, some landing place, to clasp and say,

"Farewell: We lose ourselves in light:"

And the last two lines of the final stanza strike the same note:

"Until we close with all we loved,  
And all we flow from, soul in soul."

Six centuries before Tennyson's *In Memoriam* was written, Maulana Rumi had anticipated Darwin in his expression of the same desire for self-annihilation in the ocean of the Godhead:

"I died as mineral and became a plant,  
I died as plant and rose to animal,  
I died as animal and I was man.  
Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?  
Yet once more I shall die as man, to soar  
With angels blest; but even from angelhood  
I must pass on: all except God doth perish.  
When I have sacrificed my angel soul,  
I shall become what no mind e'er conceived.  
Oh, let me not exist. For non-existence  
Proclaims in organ tones, 'To him we shall return'."

After the Sufi has reached this stage of *fana* or absorption, nothing of him is left in him. Immersed in unity he is dead to himself and knows neither law, nor religion, nor any form of phenomenal existence. There is, however, yet a higher stage. To abide in God (*baqa*) after having been lost to self is the mark of the perfect man. He not only journeys to God, *i.e.* passes from plurality to unity, but is one with God, *i.e.*, continuing in the unitive state he returns with

God to the phenomenal world from which he set out, and manifests unity in plurality. Of him, writes Dr. Nicholson, it may be said in the words of a great Christian mystic (Ruysbroeck) that "he goes *towards* God, by inward love, in eternal work, and he goes *in* God, by his fruitive inclination, in eternal rest. And he dwells in God; and yet he goes out towards created things in a spirit of love towards all things, in the virtues and in works of righteousness. And this is the most exalted summit of the inner life."

There is no need to enter into a metaphysical discussion concerning this desire for a final, ineffable union with the Being of Beings. The ethical exposition of the doctrine, as it presents itself to an ordinary mind, serves a better purpose. Such a union ought to take place every day, every hour, every moment. For aught we know, it may be too late to wait for it till the spirit has had its exit from the carnal cage. Whatever separates one's self during one's existence from all that is good and beautiful must be cast aside every moment. This is the sense in which many Persian mystics appear to have understood the doctrine of union and to have laid stress on purity of heart and the bridling of the passions, charity and self-renunciation as necessary means to that sublime end. For such communion one need not go through various ascetic stages. In the subjugation of the will and the consequent ethical rhythm and harmony of existence is that union realized.

Religious divines tell the Sufi that the universe has come into being in accordance with a divine fiat, that the Creator is above, as well as within it, but that no mortal being can hope to hold commerce with Him during his earthly life. The Father in Heaven, who has spread the Universe around Him and in whom dwell all living things, may of course be reached and seen too. But when? Only when the

spirit has cast off its worn-out robe and abides in another life, higher, deeper, innermost, sense-freed, unchanging; but then, too, as the One Lord Supreme, an entirely distinct entity. The mystic, however, has no patience to wait until the bourne is reached whence he cannot return to earth. His cabined, ardent soul flutters for the bliss of union *during*, not *after*, this life. He wills it and is confident of attaining his object. Others have tried and failed, and have therefore declared that such a consummation is beyond the pale of possibility. But that does not deter him.

"They said, 'He is not to be found. We have sought him long';  
A thing which is not to be found, that is my desire."

### THE HEART, THE MIRROR OF DIVINITY.

Desire, then, being so strong, and the spirit so daring, the hero of our story sets out on his quest, runs to "bare crags and moors undiscovered of man," seeks Him and Him alone, seeks Him and finds Him. How and where? Let us hear.

"Cross and Christians, from end to end,  
I surveyed; He was not on the Cross.  
I went to the idol-temple, to the ancient pagoda;  
No trace was visible there.  
I went to the mountains of Herat and Candahar;  
I looked, He was not in that hill and dale.  
With set purpose I fared to the summit of Mount Qaf\*  
In that place was only the Anqa's habitation.  
I bent the reins of search to the Ka'ba;  
He was not in that resort of old and young.  
I questioned Ibn Sina of His state;  
He was not within Ibn Sina's range, †

\*Oriental geographers have localised the mountain of Qaf in the Caucasus. It is believed to be the haunt of the famous *Anqa* or *Simurg*, the mysterious bird by which the Sufis represent the Lord of the Universe.

† Like Mansur Hallaj, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) was also a champion of free thought and he gave great offence to the religious divines who accused him of blasphemy.

I fared towards the scene of two bow-lengths' distance,\*  
 He was not in that exalted court.  
 I gazed into my heart;  
 There I saw Him: He was nowhere else."

"Your Self", says the author of *Gulshan i Rāz*, "is a copy made in the image of God. Seek in yourself all that you desire to know." By self is meant one's real self after one has died to his phenomenal self and abides eternally in the Lord.

This simple doctrine of immanence, or the indwelling of God in the soul, the Sufi delights to embrace. As, however, it savours somewhat of blasphemy, he apologizes for it in these touching words:

"O heart, we have searched from end to end: I saw in  
 Thee nought save the Beloved.  
 Call me not infidel, O heart, if I say, Thou Thyself art  
 He."

These words, "thou thyself art He," recall the aphorism of Hindu theosophy *tat tvam*, "Thou art it." The highest knowledge, says Max Müller in his Hibbert Lectures, was expressed in these words. "Thou thyself, thy own true self, that which can never be taken from thee; when everything else that seemed to be thine for a time disappears, when all that was created vanishes again like a dream, thy own true Self belongs to the Eternal Self; the *Atman* or Self within thee is the true Brahman, from whom thou wast estranged for a time through birth and death, but who receives thee back again as soon as thou returnest to Him or to It."

The object of one's desire being thus with one's self and within one's self, the Sufi says, "Ye, who are in search of God, are yourselves God. Wherefore any search, when God is you, is you?"

\*This is an allusion to the verse in the Quran: "Then, he (Gabriel) approached (the Prophet), and drew nigh, until he was at the distance of two bow-lengths or nearer." According to the Sufis, this passage signifies the approach of the Prophet himself to the divine presence.

With one's self. Within one's self. There is, however, still a veil that divides the lover and the beloved. The Path from *Me* to God is yet the farthest, even though His seat is not further away than the heart. This barrier is the Ego.

The consciousness of one's own personality makes the desired union impracticable. But what is a mystic good for, if he cannot think his personality away? He can withdraw the soul within itself, and denude himself of everything sensuous — reason, imagination, motion and passion.

He can cleanse the doors of perception, over which hang cobwebs of vain imagination, preconceived notions and illusions, and can discern in his inmost sanctuary his true self. This attainment of self-knowledge is the beginning of the pathway to reality. Now the truth dawns on him that there is no hell but selfhood, no paradise but selflessness. He sees that his "deeper self," or what Plotinus called "Higher Life," is always tending towards union with reality, towards the gathering of itself up into one, while the surface-self, or lower life, designed for intercourse with the outward world, always tends to fall downwards. Thus does he find himself pulled two ways at once and fluctuates between their counter-attractions and claims. He can have no peace until the conflict is quelled; and the struggle can only be ended by self-simplification or purgation which demands supreme manliness, singleness of purpose and self-control.

### THE GOSPEL OF SELF-LOSS.

Mysticism thus acquires a practical aspect. It does not lead merely to spiritual softness and stagnation, as is generally supposed, but stimulates the cultivation of certain militant qualities that are indispensable to the stern struggle for self-discipline, self-adjustment

and self-culture. Selfhood has to be killed before reality can be attained. The I, the Me and the Mine must be ejected from the centre of one's consciousness. Then only will the cross-currents of desire cease to confound and swallow up humanity. Then and then only will man be inwardly free. With that freedom will come strength and suppleness, and all things will be under man, although at present he is under them. He will be rid of all desire. No more wishing and no more asking, no more scorching under the heat of having and no more burning under the flames of foregoing. Making his way thus through the valley of poverty and detachment, throwing off the dross of self and brushing aside all superfluities that hinder his progress, he ascends the heights of self-knowledge and arrives at the summit of his personality. Here all the strength he has acquired and all the forces of his character are directed towards one single end instead of being dissipated among countless wants and desires, and that end is to forge a path deeper and deeper into the heart of Reality. This is the final stage of spiritual development. No siren voice of self can now lure him away from this path. The mystic now passes beyond the cosmic experience of God to personal contact with Him, the inexpressible union of the soul with the Eternal Spirit. Here, in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, "The soul in a wonderful and unspeakable manner both seizes and is seized upon, devours and is herself devoured, embraces and is violently embraced, and by the knot of love she unites herself with God, and is with Him as the Alone with the Alone."

The Western as well as the Eastern mystics call this achievement headlessness, that is, self-negation, total nescience. Thus Jalal-ud-din Rumi sings:

"In me there is no 'I' and 'we'; I am nought, without  
head and without feet;  
I have sacrificed head and soul to gain the Beloved."

What a charming echo of this do we hear in the following words of Angelus Silesius, who played on the same harp four centuries after Jalal-ud-din!

"While aught thou art, or know'st, or lov'st, or hast,  
Not yet, believe me, is thy burden gone —  
Who is as though he were not—ne'er had been —  
That man, oh joy! is made God absolute.  
Self is suppressed by self-annihilation.  
The nearer nothing, so much more divine."

"Self-loss finds God—to let God also go,  
That is the real, most rare abandonment."

Numerous are the analogues in which this self-loss is taught by the Sufi Master. Of these the following is the most typical, indicating after what travail Human Love finds admission into the sanctuary of Divinity.

A lover knocks at the door of the beloved, and a voice from within enquires, "Who is there?"

"It is I," says the lover.

Sharp comes the reply:

"This house will not hold me and thee."

The door remains closed, and the dejected lover finds his way to the wilderness. He fasts, and weeps and prays in solitude for a long time and then returns and knocks at the door once more.

The Voice again asks, "Who is there?"

"It is Thou," replies the chastened lover.

The door immediately opens. The lover and the Beloved are face to face.

This mystical death and mystical union are not attained in a day. What vales and wildernesses has this lover left behind; what "bare places, where desolation stalks"; what heights ascended; what a sublime summit reached! Says the Sufi mentor:

"O raw hastener, through patient awaiting,  
You must climb to the summit, step by step.  
Boil your pot by degrees and in a masterly way,  
Food boiled in mad haste is spoiled."

The Almighty might have created the Universe in the twinkling of an eye. "Why then," asks the poet, "did He protract the work of creation over six days, each of which—according to our computation—was equivalent to a thousand years? Why did the formation of Adam take forty days? Because his clay was kneaded by slow degrees. Man had to be evolved from the animal into the human state.

"Of his first soul he has now no remembrance,  
And he will be again changed from his present soul.  
To escape from his present soul, full of lusts,  
He must behold thousands of reasonable souls."

### THE PATH.

Numerous are the grades of this ascent. If we have been fortunate enough to find the Sufi traveller at the door of union, it is but fit that we tarry a little and take a bird's-eye view of the vales and wildernesses, steeps and jungles through which he has found his way.

These eyes of ours are, however, useless for the purpose, nor will the best of our binoculars be of any avail. Luckily, a special telescope for the purpose has been left behind by Shaykh Farid-ud-din Attar, the gifted author of the famous Colloquy of the Birds, for those wanderers in the Wilderness of Love who may care to avail themselves of it. It is not a mere telescope, it is a vitascope as well, presenting a series of vivid pictures such as one cannot hope to see elsewhere.

Here, then, we see a large assemblage of birds. These feathered friends, who represent human souls, have set their hearts on attending the mysterious court of Simurg, the King of Birds. In the language of the Sufis, the Simurg is the type of Divine Unity, embracing all plurality. Despite the hardships and perils of the journey, these birds have mustered strong under the banner of their daring leader, the

Upupa (Hoopoe) who has undertaken to guide them through all the dales and deserts to the Kuh-i-Qaf, the seat of the Sovereign Bird. To borrow the words of Matthew Arnold, a beacon of hope he appears, languor is not in his heart, weakness not in his word, weariness not on his brow. The trumpet sounds and the march begins "on to the bound of the waste, on to the City of God."

At the very commencement of the journey, the birds begin to tremble at the sight of the awe-inspiring road. Their gifted leader, however, has an inexhaustible store of inspiring stories, to cheer them during their march through the seven valleys through which the journey lies.

Now let us turn to the picture of these valleys. The first is the valley of the Quest, the second of Love; the third of Knowledge; the fourth of Detachment; the fifth of Unity; the sixth of Bewilderment and the seventh, the steepest of all, of Annihilation. What dense deserts are there in each of these valleys! What hordes of wild beasts and Satan's emissaries haunt these jungles! An armour knit with many an austere virtue is required to resist the attacks of these foes. Such an armour only a few possess; therefore it is, that we see thousands of these little birds faltering and lagging behind or finding a grave in the valleys. Thirty birds—only thirty out of millions—survive and approach the capital of the Simurg.

After all this travail what a cold welcome these storm-tost souls receive at the sacred threshold! Back, back are they ordered by the Usher of the Royal Court. Their grief at such a reception is so heart-rending that the curtain is at last removed by divine favour, and the sore-smitten pilgrims are admitted to the presence of the King.

Their troubles, however, do not end there. Saintly though their conduct was, marvellous their abstinence

and heroic their fortitude, a long, long register is now produced in the Divine Court, enumerating all their sins of omission and commission. Poor, benighted things! They are sunk in confusion and are utterly annihilated. This bewilderment and annihilation, however, purify them from all earthly elements, and they receive a new life from the divine effulgence. Now they go through another course of bewilderment, in which every trace of all that they had done in their previous life is obliterated. This is *Baqā* after *Fana*, immortality after perishability, life after life's loss, eternal existence after extinction.

### THEISM OR PANTHEISM

How shall we interpret this doctrine of Oneness? Is it theism or pantheism? This reminds one of the question which John Sterling once put to Carlyle, and the reply he received. Emancipated by a sudden flash of inspiration, the once doubting, despairing, disbelieving dreamer of Chelsea passed at once from the Everlasting No to the Everlasting Yea. Thenceforth, embracing the mystical beliefs of the German transcendentalists, he was never weary of proclaiming that the Highest dwelt visibly in that mystic unfathomable visibility which called itself "I" on this earth.

John Sterling could see nothing but flat pantheism in this creed and its countless corollaries. "It is mere pantheism, that," said he on one occasion. "And suppose it were pot-theism, if the thing is true?" asked Carlyle. Had that sovereign saint Bayazid been asked the same question, his frantic lips would, no doubt, have vouchsafed a reply equally candid, if not more irreverent.

The great thing is to know the thought. The expression matters little. Let us, therefore, try to comprehend this one fundamental principle of Sufism.

Has the supreme Unnamable any personality? Is there anywhere an infinite Ego transcending space, transcending time? Or is it only man, the acme of creation, that has an ego of his own in which the Infinite Ego, the creature of his own imagination, is reflected? Can an answer to this riddle be found?

### THE SUFI'S CRITIQUE OF REASON

Our Sufi mentor scoffs at any such attempt being made by the uninitiated. In his opinion human reason is good for nothing. With him the only basis of certainty is consciousness, what Coleridge has paraphrased as intuitive reason. It is only by spiritual clairvoyance or illumination from above and not by exercise of reason that the Truth can be perceived. Our earthly reason is merely a burden, and it is lost in bewilderment when the light of the Truth is revealed. So says Shabistari, summing up Jami's advice in the following couplet:

"Cease to boast of your reason and learning;  
Here reason is shackle, and learning a folly."

So also Jami:

"O heart, thy high prized learning of the schools,  
Geometry and Metaphysic rules —  
Yea, all but lore of God is devil's lore;  
Fear God and leave this evil lore to fools."\*

Maulana Rumi goes a step further and advises us to sell cleverness and buy bewilderment.

"Traditional knowledge, when inspiration is available,  
Is like making ablutions with sand when water is near.  
Make yourself ignorant, be submissive, and then  
You will obtain release from your ignorance.  
For this reason, O son, the Prince of men declared,  
'The majority of those in Paradise are the foolish.'  
Cleverness is as wind raising storms of pride;  
Be foolish, so that your heart may be at peace;

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\* *Lawa'ih*, Flash II.

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a mere metaphysical abstraction. Nay, the Beloved is the one single entity that is all in all to the Sufi. Take, for instance, the following verses from the *Masnavi*:—

"The Beloved is all in all, the lover only veils Him,  
The Beloved is all that lives, the lover a dead thing.  
When the lover feels no longer Love's quickening,  
He becomes like a bird who has lost his wings.  
Alas, how can I retain my senses about me,  
When the Beloved shows not the light of His countenance?"

Again, the only Real Agent, the sole force and the motor of the Universe, is this One Supreme. Then, what are we?

Listen to the words of the father of Sufi Poetry:—

"We are the captured game; who is the snare?  
We are the balls; who is the bat?  
He tears and mends; who is this tailor?  
He fans and kindles the flame; who is this kindler?"

Better still:—

"I am as the pen in the fingers of the Writer,  
I am not in a position to obey or not at will."

According to the *Hadis* (Tradition of Muhammad), "In existence there is none who works but God." The author of the *Mystic Rose Garden* elaborates this saying in the following verses:

"Recognise the working of 'The Truth' in every place,  
Place not foot beyond your own proper limits.  
Ask of your own state what this free-will is,  
And thence know who are the men of free-will;  
Every man whose faith is other than predestinarian,  
Is according to the prophet even as a Gueber\*.  
Like as those Guebers speak of Yazdan and Ahriman,  
So these ignorant fools say 'I' and 'He'.  
The attribution of actions to us is imaginary,  
That attribution itself is but a play and a farce.  
You existed not when your actions were originated,  
You were appointed to fulfil a certain purpose.

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\*The Zoroastrians set up men's will beside God's. Hence the *Hadis* "The men of free-will (Ahriman's) are Guebers".

By the uncaused sovereign will of 'The Truth',  
 By His fore-knowledge giving absolute command,  
 There was predestined, before soul and body were,  
 For every man his appointed work.

Since you are impotent in the hands of 'The Truth',  
 Abandon and forsake this self of yours.  
 In 'The All' you will obtain deliverance from self,  
 In 'The Truth' you will become rich, O Darvish,  
 Go, soul of your father, yield yourself to God's will,  
 Resign yourself to the divine fore-ordinance."

The Beloved of the Sufi is thus the Allah of the Quran, the Jehovah of the Old Testament, the King of Kings, the Author of Good and Evil, the Master of Compassion and Retribution. This is as it should be. Conceived on the soil of Islam, this anthropomorphic idea of a patriarchal deity and its poetic expressions are but the periphrases of the well-known formula, "There is no deity but Allah", a formula which sums up the system described by Palgrave as the Pantheism of Force or Act, exclusively assigned to God.

### THE COMMINGLING OF THE ONE AND THE MANIFOLD

How, then, does this strong, separate individuality gradually vanish in the mist? Whence emerges the mystic identification of the divine and the human? Whence the commingling of the One and the Manifold? Whence the *Ana al-Haqq* of Mansur? Whence the *world-soul-am-I* of Jalal-ud-din? The latter-day speculations of the old Sufistic theosophy have embodied such foreign concepts of an undifferentiated and impersonal unity, that some even compare the Truth (*Haqq*) of Persian mysticism to the *Sat* of the Upanishads; and no wonder, for what is *Ana al-Haqq* if not an echo, a clear and distinct, though distant, echo of the following words of *Shri Krishna* in the *Bhagavad-Gita*:—

"Victory I am and Action! and the goodness of the good,  
And Vasudeva of Vrishni's race, and of this Pandu brood  
Thyself, yea my Arjuna, thyself; for thou art Mine!"

To the staunch followers of Islam these notes may seem quite out of tune, but to the students of Sufistic lore they simply make one music with their choice melodies. There is in both the systems the same idea of emanation, the same idea of immanence, of incarnation, one might say, though not of *re-incarnation*, the same identification of the worshipper and the worshipped and the same ultimate absorption. Further, in both Indian and Persian mysticism, besides the *I* and the *non-I* we trace a third postulate of existence synthesising both by being in and outside both. Hard it may be to conceive this primal unity, harder still to reconcile it with the idea of separateness that seems to permeate both the systems simultaneously with the idea of oneness. Yet these are the words of Shri Krishna:—"I, who am all, and made it all, abide its separate Lord." What is true knowledge? Says Shri Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

"It is this:

To see one changeless life in all the lives,  
And in the separate one Inseparable."

### THE MOST DISTINCTIVE FEATURE OF ORIENTAL MYSTICISM

In this consciousness of an omnipresent, all-per-vading unity, in which every vestige of individuality is swallowed we notice the most distinctive feature of oriental as compared with occidental mysticism. To become like God, or to participate in the divine nature, is the aim of the European mystic. Oriental mysticism goes a step further and asks the devotee to throw off the shackles of his unreal self-hood and thereby to be reunited with the One Infinite Being. Deification is The *Ultima Thule* of the Hindu as well as the Muslim mystic.

But close though the resemblance is between the Hindu and Muslim ideas of Oneness, it is clear that the Beloved of the mystic of Iran, whose dazzling beauty and awe-inspiring splendour is the theme of many a Sufi song, is not the same abstract deity as the *Brahman* or rather the *Parabrahman*, of the Indian sage, devoid of all personal attributes. Neither is there any reason to believe that Sufism has been in any wise deliberately grafted on Vedantism.

### THE ORIGIN OF SUFISM

It would be idle to assume a common origin from mere resemblances in the two systems, even though the similarity may be very definite, both in substance as well as in form. Simply because one belief is identical with another it does not follow that the one is generated by the other. Wherever the human mind is exercised on the why and the wherefore of existence, the whence and the whither of the spirit confined in the carnal cage, wherever there is the same longing and the same striving, there has been and there will be the same lisping and the same smattering of "infants crying for the light". Therefore it is that we come across utterances of mystics of different countries and of different ages which would pass current, word for word, for those of others, even though they could never have heard the words or even the names of one another. It would be a blunder to designate Sufism as but a Muslim adaptation of the doctrine of the Vedanta School, and it is strange that a student of Islam, like Hughes, should have allowed such a statement to creep into his notes on Muhammadanism. The life and the teachings of the early Sufis do not warrant such an assumption and the entire history of Persian mysticism is against it.

Sufism is certainly not an exotic. It is the product of Islam's own native soil. There are verses

in the Quran which lend themselves to mystical interpretation. For instance,

"If my servants ask thee about Me, lo, I am near."

"We are nearer to him than his own neck-vein."

"In the earth are signs to those of real faith, and in your-  
What, do you not see?" [selves.

For the devotional and ascetic type of Sufis there was enough inspiring material of this kind in the Quran itself. But the Prophet is believed to have left for his select disciples a good deal more than what is embodied in the Holy Book. It is said that he taught certain esoteric doctrines to a few select companions and that Sufism is based on those doctrines. The question arises, who initiated him in those mysteries? The answer is, the *awliya* the saints, the invisible spiritual guides and the masters of compassion, in whose existence and benign dispensations the Sufis believe. It is, however, hard to reconcile this theory with the internal evidence of the Quran. Islam as taught by the prophet of Arabia is a virile protest against asceticism. No doubt, some of the sayings of the Prophet lend themselves easily to mystical interpretation, for instance, *al-faqrū fakhri* (poverty is my pride), but at the same time there is the unequivocal dictum: "There is no monasticism in Islam". He extolled poverty and prescribed fasting, but never advocated the cultivation of "fugitive and cloistered virtue". It may, nevertheless, be argued that for reasons not difficult to conceive, the Prophet may have deemed it desirable to preach to the people generally what he considered proper for the time being, and that he may have initiated only a select few in his esoteric doctrines. This is the view taken not merely by theologians who wish to reconcile Islam with Sufism, but also by philosophic thinkers and authors like al-Ghazali. To the student of history, however, nothing can be a more confounding riddle

than this that a Prophet who throughout his life advocated an active life and infused into his disciples a strenuous spirit of proselytism should have in the same breath propounded contrary esoteric doctrines, leading to a passive quietism, if not rigid asceticism. Here is an instance, cited by Bjerregaard, in '*The Path*' (1886), of Muhammad's avowed dislike of an attempt made to engraft the elements of a contemplative life upon his doctrines:—

"One evening after some more vigorous declamations than usual on the Prophet's part—he had taken for his theme the flames and tortures of hell—several of his most zealous companions, among whom the names of Omar, Ali, Abou-Dharr and Abou-Horeirah are conspicuous, retired to pass the night together in a neighbouring dwelling. Here they fell into a deep discourse on the terrors of divine Justice, and the means to appease or prevent its course. The conclusion they came to was nowise unnatural. They agreed that to this end the surest way was to abandon their wives, to pass their lives in continued fast and abstinence, to wear hair-cloth and practise other similar austerities: in a word, they laid down for themselves a line of conduct truly ascetic. But they desired first to secure the approbation of Muhammad. Accordingly, at break of day, they presented themselves before him, to acquaint him with the resolution of the night, as well as its motives and purport; but they had reckoned without their host. The Prophet rejected their proposition with a sharp rebuke and declared marriage and war (crusade) to be far more agreeable to the Divinity than any austereness of life or mortification of the senses whatever, and the well known passage of the Quran: "O true believers, do not abstain from the good things of the earth which God permits you to enjoy", revealed on this very occasion, remains a lasting monument of Muhammad's disgust at this premature outbreak of ascetic feeling."

### THE STORY OF INITIATION OF HAZRAT-ALI

Curiously enough, the *Manaqib ul-Ārifin* (The Acts of the Adepts) gives another anecdote which would seem to indicate that, although the Prophet was averse to a *premature* adoption of a contemplative

life, he initiated a few in the esoteric doctrines of the higher spiritual life. According to this account, the prophet one day confided to Hazrat Ali in private certain secrets and mysteries of the *Brethren of Sincerity*, enjoining strict secrecy so far as the uninitiated were concerned. This, by the way, indicates the existence of a class of initiates. For forty days Ali's lips were sealed. But the burden caused a regular tumult in his breast till at last he was sick at heart. Even breathing became difficult. He fled to a desert and chanced upon a well. He stooped as far down into the well as he could and then, one after one, confided those mysteries to the bowels of the earth. So great was his excitement that his mouth was filled with froth and foam, which too found an outlet into the well. A few days passed by, and a seed was seen to be growing in the well. It grew, shut up as it was, until at length a shepherd youth whose heart was miraculously enlightened on the matter, became aware of the existence of the plant. He cut it down, drilled holes in it, and began to play airs upon it as he pastured his sheep. So exquisite was this music that round this Arab Orpheus camels and sheep gathered together to listen to his piping. The wild nomads also flocked to hear his strains and the whole audience went into ecstasies with delight, weeping for joy and breaking forth in transports of gratification. The matter was soon represented to the Prophet and the wonderful player was brought into the sacred presence. There, too, his dulcet notes moved all the holy disciples to tears and transports. They burst forth in exclamations of pure delight, and were, so to say, wafted away from the plane of self-consciousness. But the Messenger of God at once found out the key to this miraculous chanting, and declared that it was inspired by those very mysteries that he had confided to Ali's charge!

### THE ASCETICISM OF THE PROPHET'S COMPANIONS

Whether they were initiates of the mysterious Brotherhood or not, the Prophet and his immediate companions were not without a tinge of asceticism. These disciples had inherited the Prophet's contempt for worldly things, and their dress was peculiarly typical of the simplicity of life and avoidance of ostentation and luxury enjoined by Him. One can gather from Masudi's accounts of the orthodox Caliphs that some of them, notably Omar, used to wear a *Jubba* of wool (*suf*), patched with pieces of leather, and it was on that account that the term *Sufi* and also its equivalent *Pashmina-push* (wool-wearer) came to be applied in later times to the regular ascetics of Arabia whose distinctive badge was the same patched sack-cloth.

Nay, more; we have it on good authority that it was during the lifetime of the Prophet and under his own eyes that certain spiritual orders were established by Abu Bakr and Ali. Even the origin of the order of the Faqirs is traced to the time of Muhammad himself. It has been reported that in the first year of the Hijrah, forty-five citizens of Mecca and as many of Madina joined together to form a brotherhood. The object was spiritual as well as socialistic. Fidelity to the words of the Prophet, the daily performance of certain religious practices in a spirit of penitence and mortification, and community of property, were the main doctrines. Such a fraternity required a distinctive name and the names Faqirs and Sufis are supposed to have been adopted by them.

### THE THY-WILL-BE-DONE STATE OF SUFISM

Who then were those early Sufis? What kind of mysticism was theirs? Souls to whom a merely conventional religious life could bring no solace, souls longing to live a life quieter, deeper and purer

than the one subservient to mere forms and dogma—these were the early Sufis. Theirs was a piety, and austerity springing not from grim apprehensions of an awful hereafter, but from their own hearts beating in unison with the Infinite, hearts that gave themselves up completely to the work and will of the Perfect Cause of Causes, the Perfect Providence transcending all and yet immanent in each. Asceticism, quietism, intimate and personal love of God and disparagement of mere lip-service or formal worship, these are the distinguishing characteristics of the first band of Sufis. Far, far away as they were from the wilderness of pantheism, their metaphysics were simple enough and devoid entirely of any philosophic element. Only a spirit of quietism was upon them. To live in a passive state of trustful quietude was all that they desired. Thus Ibrahim ibn Adham, "the Key of the (mystical) sciences," as Junaïd used to call him, and his contemporaries, and that celebrated woman, Rābiah, all renounced the things of the world, name, fame, everything, even the eight heavens. All that they held dear and cherished was God's name and the greatness of His glory.

Such was the mysticism of these early Sufis, and it falls completely within the first of the three divisions into which Vaughan divides mysticism, *viz.* the theopathic. Its theosophic and theurgic developments were then unknown. Let us illustrate this by a few sayings of the Sufis themselves.

"Sufism", says Abdul Husain Nuri, "is neither precept nor doctrine, but something *inborn*. If it were a precept, it could be followed; if it were a doctrine, it could be learned; it is rather something *inborn*, and, as the Quran says, 'Ye are *created* in the image of God'. Evidently, no one can, either by application or by teaching, possess himself in the likeness of God."

Junaid's definition is still simpler: "To liberate the mind from the violence of the passions, to put off nature's claims, to extirpate human nature, to repress the sensual instinct, to acquire spiritual qualities, to be elevated through an understanding of wisdom, and to practise that which is good—that is the aim of Sufism".

### THE APHORISMS OF A FEMALE SAINT

What seems wanting in this definition is furnished by the utterances of that female saint, Rābīah, to whom the Poet Jami pays the following exquisite tribute:—

"Were women all alike those whom here I name,  
Woman to man I surely would prefer.  
The Sun is feminine", nor deems it shame;  
The moon, though masculine, depends on her."

"O God", she cries, "give unto Thine enemies whatever Thou hast assigned to me of this world's goods and unto Thy friends whatever Thou hast assigned to me in the Life hereafter, for Thou Thyself art sufficient for me."

On one occasion she was urged to marry. Here is her reply:—

"My being has for a long time been in marital communion; hence I say that my self is long ere this lost in itself and arisen again in Him. Since then I am entirely in His power, yea, I am He. He who would ask me for a bride will therefore ask me not from myself but from Him."

Hasan Basri, the famous Muslim theologian, asked her how she knew the Lord. "O Hasan," she replied, "*you* know Him by certain methods and means. *I* know Him without modes or means."

When Rābīah was ill, three theologians called upon her. With a view to inspiring her with resignation, one of them, the same Hasan Basri, said: "The prayers of that man are not sincere who

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\* According to Arabic grammar.

refuses to bear the Lord's chastisements." Another added to that: "He is not sincere who does not rejoice in the Lord's chastisements." To Rābiah, however, such sayings still savoured of self. She therefore exclaimed: "He is not sincere in his prayers who does not, when he beholds his Lord, *become totally unconscious of the fact that he is being chastised.*"

If one feels curious to know the cause of the illness of such a devout woman, this is her explanation: "I suffered myself to think on the delights of paradise, therefore my Lord has punished me."

A perfect Thy-Will-Be-Done state of spiritual life was this and it is exquisitely reflected in the following verses of Mansur Hallāj:—

"Thy will be done, O my lord and Master!  
Thy will be done, O my purpose and meaning!  
O essence of my being, O goal of my desire,  
O my speech and my hints and my gestures!  
O all of my all, O my hearing and my sight,  
O my whole and my element and my particle!"

Let us now pass on to the theosophic stage in which, besides the surrender of self, the Sufi strives to solve the problems of the higher self.

### THEOSOPHIC STAGE OF MYSTICISM

Here we find the philosophical element superadded to the mystical. According to Vaughan's classification we can call the Sufism of this period theosophic mysticism. It is at this stage that the monotheism of the orthodox Sufis gives way to a thorough-going pantheism, not the pantheism of the atheist who dissolves Deity in creation, but the spiritual pantheism that delights to lose humanity in the Deity by overcoming an admitted alienation. This was but a natural step. As Professor Browne remarks, the step from quietism to pantheism is neither long nor difficult. Thus, Abu Yazid (Bayazid) of Bistam and

Junaid of Baghdad made no secret of their ideas on this point.

"I am the Ocean without bottom, without beginning, without end", asserts Bayazid. "I am the throne of God, the preserved tablet, the Pen (or Creative Word) of God, I am Gabriel, Michael, Israfil; I am Abraham, Moses, Jesus."

Not content with self-deification, he would demand worship too! And how neat the syllogism by which he justifies this claim:

"I am God: there is no God but me: therefore worship me."

These, however, are only the lesser mysteries. Bayazid was in possession of some greater and still stranger mysteries, and it was only out of merciful consideration for frail human beings that he did not reveal them. "Should I speak of my greater experiences", said he, "you could not bear to hear them; therefore it is that I tell you somewhat of the lesser ones only."

To Junaid is ascribed a similar saying:

"For thirty years God spoke with mankind by the tongue of Junaid, though Junaid was no longer there, and men knew it not."

Philosophical doctrines and terminology now find their way into the works of the Sufis. It is now almost impossible for the adepts to dissociate the Infinite from abstraction. Universal soul and universal mind become the bywords of Sufism, and the prophet himself is identified with the *Logos*. Thus Maulana Rumi calls the world the outward form of the Universal Reason, and maintains that he who grieves him (meaning thereby, according to Whinfield, the Prophet) must expect tribulation.

"The whole world is the outward form of Universal Reason,  
For it is the father of all creatures of reason.  
When a man acts basely towards Universal Reason,  
Its form, the world, shows its teeth at him."

## INFLUENCE OF NEO-PLATONISM

How far this was the result of Neo-Platonic influences, it is not difficult to trace. Professor Browne, for one, is convinced that Sufism is more indebted to the school of Plotinus than to any other influence, and Dr. Nicholson elaborates the theory in detail. There is no doubt that in the golden age of Muslim scholarship, the Neo-Platonic philosophy was well known to Muslim students. There are many references in the works of the authors of this time to the doctrines of Plotinus and Porphyry, in addition to those of Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle and other Greek philosophers, clearly indicating that the mystic currents of Greece had found their way into the Muhammadan world. But while recognising the connection between the two mystic schools, we have to deal with two significant questions raised by Professor Browne.

(1) What elements of their philosophy did the Neo-Platonists originally borrow from the East and especially from Persia, which country Plotinus visited expressly to study the system there taught?

(2) To what extent did the seven Neo-Platonic philosophers who took refuge at the Persian Court in the reign of Naushirwan (about A. D. 632) propagate their ideas in that country?

To find an answer to the first query, let us accompany Plotinus in his metaphysical meditations and his journey to the East.

Even though it soars higher than our earthly systems, philosophy, too, has, like things and beings gross and earthly in nature, its ups and downs. In the West it reached its meridian during the days of Plato and Aristotle, but thence the decline was so rapid that, early in the third century after Christ, Plotinus found it tottering midway between doubt and disbelief.

The first Greek philosophers were physicists, and as the external world was the centre of their interest,

their philosophy took its stand on natural science to the exclusion of ethics and religion. The claims of ethics, however, could not long be ignored and the systems of Plato and Aristotle sought to adjust its rival claims against those of physics. Popular religion, on the other hand, was neglected, so that while indifferentism or charlatanism enveloped philosophy in total darkness, the need for religious sanction and earnest devotion and reverence began to be felt more strongly than ever, and a new religious, semi-philosophical, semi-speculative mood possessed a few ardent souls.

It is in a mood such as this that we find Plotinus beginning his studies. With bare negations his speculative mind refuses to remain satisfied. Some positive truth he longs for, abstract though it may be. The Dialogues of Plato and the Metaphysics of Aristotle are his constant companions day and night. By themselves, however, they do not promote the growth of his "soul-wings". He therefore practises austerities which (says Vaughan) his master, Plato, would never have sanctioned. During those studious days of an "angelic life"—"the life of the disembodied in the body"—what commands his heartfelt admiration is the life of Apollonius of Tyana, that gifted Pythagorean philosopher and strange thaumaturgist, whose miracles could earn for him from an uncharitable world no better title than the designation of a compound of magician, impostor and religious fanatic!

It is stated that while still a mere youth Apollonius renounced all the ordinary pleasures of life. "Abjuring the use of flesh and wine, he lived on the simplest fruits of the soil, wore no clothing but linen, and no sandals on his feet, suffered his hair to grow, and slept on the hard ground". Nor was this all. The Pythagorean penance of five years' silence he strictly observed, suffering often, without murmur, the most painful trials incidental to such penance. Like the

veritable ascetics of the East, he wandered on foot over Assyria and Persia, and thence to the Indus and the Ganges, visiting temples and conversing with the *rishis* of all these lands. From his visit to the Hill of Sages he returned, an accomplished sage, himself "able to foretell earthquakes and eclipses, to cure the plague, to summon spirits from the unseen world, and to restore the dead to life."

Here is a portraiture of a living *Mahatma*, a hierophant as well, and, what is more, a philosopher too, the product of Pythagoreanism and Platonism, mellowed by Zoroastrianism and Hinduism. To what extent the "supernatural powers of the Magi and the Gymnosophists," which he acquired during his sojourn in the East, assisted Apollonius in dazzling nation after nation with his prophecies and miracles, it is difficult to say. These gifts, however, captured the imagination of Plotinus.

### THE PEREGRINATIONS OF PLOTINUS

He, too, determined to travel eastward to drink himself at the fountain-head of ancient wisdom. History does not reveal whither he wandered and whence he found the elixir to allay his thirst. Our only source of information on this point is his own teaching. After an examination of this, one can say, almost with certitude, that this theosophist of the West must have come in contact with many a *rishi* of the East—if not in India, at least within the city of Alexandria—and must have picked up, according to his own light, some fragments at least of the spiritual lore of Asia. As remarked by Bouillet in his translation of the *Enneads* of Plotinus, there is such a resemblance between some of the ideas of Plotinus and those of the Oriental mystics that the conclusion is irresistible. But while there is room for doubt as to whether he visited India or not, we

have authentic evidence regarding his sojourn in Persia. His biographer, Porphyry, tells us that he visited that country expressly to study the systems of philosophy there taught. Bouillet confirms this statement. According to these accounts, Plotinus had acquired such a great taste for philosophy that he desired to study the philosophy taught to the Persians and prevailing among the Indians. When, therefore, the Emperor Gordian fitted out an expedition against the Persians, Plotinus, although thirty-nine years of age, enlisted in this army. Gordian was killed in Mesopotamia, Plotinus managed to effect his escape to Antioch.

Returning home a sadder and a wiser man, what does he find? The whole atmosphere is vitiated by scepticism. The mighty Plato—what has he left behind? Only a chattering crew of sophists. The Platonic doctrine of ideas has totally lost its influence, for the self-styled followers of the great philosopher have neither the heart to believe, nor the lips to deny. And what about the influence of Aristotle? A few peripatetic followers exist, no doubt, but torpor overwhelms them, and instead of teaching life in death they show death in life. Still ridiculing the doctrine of the *ideas*, they are unable to substitute anything for it. Meanwhile, the Epicureans and the Stoics have brought forward their rival theories of ethics, and their wrangling merely leaves a wider field for scepticism. Philosophy dwindles merely into a branch of literature, an elegant topic for the discourse and amusement of society.

The times are thus hopelessly out of joint, and the problem that stares Plotinus in the face is how to set things right. To help him in this self-imposed mission a friend takes him to Ammonius Saccas, whose advice to his pupils was to work at the reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle. "You ask me what I recommend. I say, travel back across the past. Out of the

whole of that bygone, and yet undying, world of thought construct a system greater than any of the sundered parts. Repudiate these partial scholars in the name of their masters. Leave them to their disputes, pass over their systems, already tottering for lack of foundation, and be it yours to show how their teachers join hands far above them!". \*

### THE TRIADS OF PLOTINUS

Straightway Plotinus enters upon this path and sets about constructing a new philosophy. The eternal problem—the relation of the One to the Manifold—is the first that demands solution, and in handling it he has to face one great obstacle, which had theretofore been the stumbling block of philosophy. How to reconcile the serenity and remoteness of the Unity, demanded by Logic, with the activity and contact with matter demanded for the Deity by experience? Here his knowledge of Oriental Philosophy comes to his rescue. He has learned and grasped to some extent the theory of Dynamic Pantheism by which these extremes—serenity and activity, remoteness and contact—could be reconciled without much difficulty. The Hindu doctrine of the manifestation of Divinity in His threefold attributes has given him something positive to begin with, besides other hypotheses on which to base a doctrine of a trinity. Above and beyond the God of Providence, the Demiurge of Plato, he places another such as that of Aristotle, "so restricted by his own abstraction and immutability as to render it impossible to associate with his nature the idea of superintendence," and above this Deity a Simple Unity, a Primeval Something.

This Primeval Something is—as opposed to the Finite, the Infinite. Without magnitude, without life, without thought, this something has no attributes of

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\* Vaughan: *Hours with the Mystics*.

its own, and is "above existence", "above goodness", inconceivable, ineffable. Despite all his poetic gifts, the Persian poet Jalal-ud-din recoils from describing this Absolute Unity. He calls it above description, above explanation, and seeks refuge in vague metaphors, comparing it with the Sea, Light, Love, Wine, Beauty and Truth.

"Where is the room in conception for this essence,  
So that similitudes of Him should be conceivable?"

At the same time, this Simple Unity is an active force, and as such perpetually produces something without motion, alteration or diminution of itself. Thus, production is but an emission of force. Such a system leaves no impassable gulf between the human and the divine, between the material and the spiritual. All are links in a single, continuous chain, connected each with each, and through each to one.

The next in order is the Universal Mind, the *nous*, the *Aql-i-kull*, thrown out first of all by the Original Being. Perfect Image of the One, it is the home of ideas, the archetype of all existing things. It is at once being and thought, ideal world and idea. In so far as it is the image of the One, the *nous* exactly corresponds to the Primeval Being, but in so far as it is derived, it is entirely different.

Again, the motionless *nous* has an image and product of its own. This is the Soul, the Primal Soul, the *Nafs-i-Kull*, which, like the *nous*, is immaterial, but, unlike it, a moving essence. Standing between the *nous* and the phenomenal world, it may preserve its unity and abide in the *nous*, but at the same time it has the power of uniting with the corporeal world, and thus being disintegrated.

The human souls descending into corporeality are therefore those that have allowed themselves to be ensnared by sensuality. They have cut themselves loose from their original being, and have assumed a false existence.

Another version is that the World-Soul is the archetype of all human souls. Going forth from eternity, and passing the frontiers of the intelligible, human souls enter the realm of matter, not by an act of will, but in obedience to an instinctive necessity. If so, this doctrine of Plotinus approximates closely to the Law of *Karma*. In any case, this is certain that though they plant their foot in the ideal world, these souls have become part of the phenomenal world by being embodied in matter. But not for ever; the ancient track still lies open, if they will only tread it and retrace their steps back to the Supreme Good.

### HOME, WANDERER, HOME!

Self-culture is the key to this conversion, or rather reversion. It is the body that is the dungeon of the soul. How long can such a captivity be tolerated? The trumpet-call of Plotinus is, therefore, the same as that of the Sufi Master :

“Why wilt thou dwell in mouldy cell, a Captive, O My  
heart?

Speed, speed thy flight: a nursling bright of yonder  
world thou art.

He bids thee rest upon His breast: He flings the veil  
away.

Thy home wherefore make for evermore this mansion  
of decay?

O contemplate thy true estate, enlarge thyself, and rove  
From this dark world, thy prison, whirled to that celestial  
grove.

O honoured guest in love's high feast, O bird of the angel-  
sphere,

'Tis cause to weep, if thou wilt keep thy habitation here.

A voice at morn to thee is borne—God whispers to the soul—

‘If on the way the dust thou lay, thou soon wilt gain the  
goal.’

That road be thine toward the Shrine! and lo, in bush  
and briar.



## THE EVOLUTION OF SUFI PHILOSOPHY

We may, however, notice, here, the principal changes in the ideas and the terminology of the Sufistic philosophy after its contact with Alexandrian Philosophy. At first the Sufi believed that creation was the result of the Divine fiat. "*Be*", said He, and it *was*. *Allah* acted by willing. He wished it, and there were created the heavens and the earth and everything between. And from the surface of the earth He *created* Adam, "taking a handful of every colour that it comprised; which was kneaded with various waters; and He completely formed it, and breathed into it the soul, so it became an animated sentient being." After the contact, however, the *velle* was united with the *esse*. Nothing was created from external matter. The *Haqq* simply rayed itself out into creatures. A new terminology is also noticeable. The Logos, or Universal Mind (*Aql-i-kull*) proceeds from the Deity. It is the eldest offspring of the One Primal Unity, the source of all Existence, the cause of all matter, animate and inanimate, the ground of all being, the Highest Thought, the Highest Good, the Highest Beauty. The Universal Soul (*Nafs-i-kull*) is begotten by the Universal Mind and is connected with the world of sense, the material world. "The whole world," says Maulana, "is the outward form of Universal Reason, for it is the father of all creatures of reason." The doctrine of re-absorption naturally follows, heaven and hell present quite a new aspect, and the "inner light" gives place to ecstasy, kindling the vision and making it clair-voyant.

The *Sat*, *Chit*, *Ananda* of Hindu theosophy are clearly discernible in this Sufi theory of successive emanations of Divinity. Whinfield, however, discerns in it traces of the ancient Persian Angelology as well as Greek Ontology. In a note on the verses in which the

author of *Gulshan-i-Raz* describes these emanations under the figure of the successive chapters of the Quran the erudite translator observes: "The Alexandrian doctrine of emanations—intermediate potencies or intelligences by whom God acts on the world of phenomena—'links between the Divine spirit and the world of matter'—seems to have sprung from an amalgamation of the ancient Persian Angelology—the *Amashaspands*, *Izads* and *Fravashis*—with Greek Ontology, the 'ideas' of Plato, the logos of Philo, the *nous* of Plotinus".

### INFLUENCE OF ZOROASTRIANISM

The direct influence of ancient Persian ideas on Neo-platonism and, through it, on Sufism still remains to be ascertained. We have seen that both Plotinus and his master, Apollonius of Tyana, had travelled in Persia and studied the religious and philosophic doctrines prevalent in that country. Long before them Pythagoras had travelled extensively in Asia, and he too had come under the spell of oriental theosophy. We do not discover, however, any ideas in their systems analogous to those of good and evil which form a special feature of Zoroastrianism. Zoroaster was the first prophet and philosopher who enunciated the principles of polarity as they are found to influence sentient existence. The eternal conflict between matter and spirit, good and evil, necessity and free-will he sought to explain and reconcile by means of this theory of polarity. In the theological system of this seer of remote antiquity the highest place is assigned to the All-knowing and All-pervading Spirit, *Ahura-Mazda*, as the master of all that is good and the principle of all righteousness. But omnipotent though He is, He does not create the universe as He chooses. He acts by fixed laws, one of which is that existence implies polarity and that

there can be no good without corresponding evil. He, therefore, allows the twin primeval principles, *Spento Mainyush*, or the Beneficent Spirit, and *Angre Mainyush*, or the Maleficent Spirit, full and free scope to exercise their influence on the universe, confident in the belief that good will at last triumph over evil. The duty of the true Zoroastrian, therefore, is to recognise *Spento Mainyush*, the Intelligence to which *Ahura Mazda* has committed the care of nature, to adore its attributes and take them as his model, to detest *Angre Mainyush*, the author of all evil, and to shun his works and snares. Thus man may weaken and bring to an end the tyranny which the evil principle exercises over the world, ensure the victory of the righteous principle and exalt the glory of the Lord. Although there is nothing in the system of Plotinus to suggest that it was influenced to any appreciable extent by this Zoroastrian doctrine of polarity, there is enough evidence to show that the theories of other Platonist philosophers received a great stimulus from it. Plotinus is believed to have been indebted to Numenius, more than to Ammonius, for some of the ideas peculiar to his system. In dealing with the conflict of good and evil, Numenius appears to have anticipated the hypostases of Plotinus. How could the immutable One create the Manifold without self-degradation? This was the difficulty that oppressed him just as heavily as it did his predecessors and successors. He studied the dogmas of the Egyptians, the Persians, and the Buddhists and, in the light of the knowledge thus acquired, he tried to solve the enigma by means of a hypostatic emanation. He posits in the Divine Nature three principles in a descending scale so that his order of existence is as follows:—

1. God, the Absolute.
2. The Demiurge, who is the artificer, in a sense, the imitator of the former. He contemplates matter, yet he is himself separate from it. He is the Agent of God, the Absolute, for the creation of the material universe and man, and is good, for goodness is the original principle of Being. As, however this second Hypostasis is engaged in the contemplation of matter, it does not attain the supreme self-contemplation of the first.
3. Substance or Essence, of a twofold character, corresponding to the two former. The universe is the copy of the third Principle.

*Spento-Mainyush* is clearly discernible here, although *Angre Mainyush* is veiled.

The last great name among the Neo-Platonists is that of Proclus, "learned in the lore of symbols and oracles and in the rapt utterances of Orpheus and of Zoroaster." He elaborated the trinity of Plotinus into a succession of Triads reminiscent of the influence of Zoroastrianism. Without, however, being dogmatic on this point we may simply note the broad and incontrovertible facts which emerge from this survey of the Neo-Platonic philosophy, namely, that several of the ancient philosophers of Greece had drunk freely at the fountain of Zoroastrian theology and that there was a complete fusion of the ideas of the East and West in the different systems of philosophy, with which their names have been associated. When, therefore, the seven Neo-platonic philosophers took shelter in Persia, during the reign of Naushirwan, and entertained the people of that land with the nectar of Greek philosophy, they merely poured, so to say, old wine in new bottles. Naushirwan was a patron of science and learning. It was, therefore, natural that the seven philosophers, Hermias, Eulalias, Priscian, Damascius, Isidore and Simplicius, who were driven from their homes by the persecution of Justinian, should have thought of taking refuge at his court. There is no record extant of what the philosophers

did there. We find, however, that under the Persian monarch's orders the works of the most celebrated Greek and Sanskrit authors were translated in Pahlavi and that a medical school was established at *Jund-i-Shapur*, which expanded into an academy in which philosophy and rhetoric were taught. This school disseminated in the East a knowledge of Greek science and created a taste for philosophic and medical studies. We have, further, the testimony of Renan that the Aristotelian studies pursued in this Academy gave the first impulse to Arabic lexicology.

### THE HERITAGE OF THE SASANIAN CULTURE

This, then, was the heritage left behind them in Persia by the seven sages of Greece. There is little doubt that the seeds of the later philosophic doctrines of Sufism were sown in Persia during the Sasanian period. Unfortunately, the sacred books of the ancient Persians were destroyed after the conquest of Persia by the Arabs. It is, therefore, impossible to say in what precise form Zoroastrian philosophical ideas emerged from the mint of Neo-Platonism and what influence they directly exercised on the Sufis. It is probable that not much of that philosophic lore had survived the shocks of time, otherwise the theosophy of the early Sufis would have been impregnated with it. As a matter of fact, it is only after the Arab scholars had gained their first knowledge of Greek philosophy from the works of the Neo-Platonists, and philosophers such as Farabi, Ghazali, Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sina had popularised Neo-Platonic metaphysics, that these metaphysical ideas permeated the philosophy of the Sufis. Nevertheless, Pincott, in Hughes' "Dictionary of Islam," traces the source of Sufism to Zoroastrianism. In his interesting article on the religion of the Sikhs, he observes: "Sufism is not, as Dr. Trumpp supposes, due to Hindu

Pantheism, for it arose in the very earliest days of Muhammadanism, and is almost certainly due to the influence of Persian Zoroastrianism on the faith of Arab Islamism." We cannot, however, be so dogmatic on this point without any corroborative evidence as to the identity of the ideas underlying the two systems. As a matter of fact, we do not see any very striking correspondence. No doubt, we may discern the influence of the Zoroastrian ideas of good and evil in the teachings of those Sufis who believed that the diversity of phenomena arose from the admixture of light and darkness. Maulana Rumi elaborates this idea, but even here we do not find any reference to that struggle between *Spento Mainyush* and *Angra Mainyush*, which forms the key-note of the Zoroastrian faith.

All, then, that can be said with certainty is that the sacred stream of Sufism originated in the silver springs of the Sufi's own motherland. In its wanderings it embraced the Neo-Platonic rivulet, the last branch of Greek philosophy which sought to reconcile the Platonic and the Aristotelian systems with the early Oriental philosophy. Here it imbibed also a tincture of the mystical element of Christian Gnosticism. Its starting point, however, was the confluence of Zoroastrianism and Islam.

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**THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS**  
**IN FOUR PARTS**

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**PART I**  
**THE PARLIAMENT OF THE BIRDS**



## THE PARLIAMENT OF THE BIRDS

Once upon a time, in the dim old days, all the birds of the world assembled in solemn conclave to consider a momentous question.

Ever since the dawn of Creation the inhabitants of every city had had a king or leader, called *Shahryar*, or the friend of the city, but these feathered souls had no king to befriend them. Theirs was an army without a general—a position most precarious. How could they be successful in the battle of life without a leader to guide the weak-winged party through the perils of earthly existence? Many an eloquent speaker addressed the assembly, deploring their helpless plight in plaintive terms, bringing tears to the eyes of the tiny ones, and it was unanimously agreed that it was highly desirable, nay, absolutely necessary, that they should place themselves without delay under the protection of a king.

At this stage, full of fervour, leapt forward the Hoopoe (Hud-hud) renowned in the Muslim scriptures for the part she had played as King Solomon's trusted emissary to Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba. She had on her bosom the crest symbolizing her spiritual knowledge and on her head shone the crown of faith.

"Dear birds", she said, "I have the honour to belong to the Celestial Army. I know the Lord and the secrets of creation. When one carries, as I do, the name of God writ large upon its beak, one may be given the credit of knowing many a secret of the spiritual world."

In the same vein of exultation she recounted her physical and mental qualities. She had the gift of divining underground sources of water and had directed the genii to them by pecking the earth. She had gone round the globe in the days of the Deluge

and had accompanied Solomon in his journey through dales and deserts. She was the forerunner of his army and his faithful messenger.

"We have a king, my friends," said she, "I have obtained an indication of His court; but to go alone in quest of Him is beyond my power. If, however, you accompany me, I think we may hope to reach the threshold of His Majesty. Yea, my friends, we have a king, whose name is Simurg\*, and whose residence is behind Mount Caucasus. He is close by, but we are far away from Him. The road to His throne is bestrewn with obstructions; more than a hundred thousand veils of light and darkness screen the throne. Hundreds of thousands of souls burn with an ardent passion to see Him, but no one is able to find his way to Him. Yet none can afford to do without Him. Supreme manliness, absolute fearlessness and complete self-effacement are needed to overcome those obstacles. If we succeed in getting a glimpse of His face, it will be an achievement indeed. If we do not attempt it, and if we fail to greet the Beloved, this life is not worth living."

The Hoopoe then described to her winged friends how the Simurg had first made His appearance on earth.

"During the early days of Creation He passed one midnight in His radiant flight over the land of China. A feather from His wing fell on Chinese soil. Instantly there was great tumult throughout the world. Everyone was seized with a desire to take a picture of that feather, and whoever saw the picture lost his senses. That feather is still in China's picture-gallery. 'Seek knowledge, even in China' points to this."†

\* The famous bird that in Sufi poetry signifies the Supreme Being and is an emblem of plurality in unity.

† This refers to the verse in the Quran in which the faithful are asked to go in search of knowledge, even to China — a very laborious journey when there were no mechanical means of transport.

On hearing this account of the Simurg, the birds lost all patience and were seized with a longing to set out at once in quest of the Sovereign Bird. They became His friends and their own enemies and wished to go forward in search of Him, but when they were told how long and fearful the road was, they were completely unnerved and brought forward several excuses. These apologies were typical of the personal idiosyncrasies of the different species of the birds.

The first to retrace its steps was the Nightingale, known for his passionate fancy for the Rose and for the rapturous melodies in which he sings of his love. "I am so completely drowned in the ocean of love for my Rose", said he, "that I have practically no life of my own. How can a tiny thing like me have the fortitude to withstand the splendour of the Simurg? For me the love of the Rose is enough."

"Oh", cried the Hoopoe, "ye who stop short at mere appearances, being enamoured of external beauty only, talk no more of Love. Your love for the Rose has merely spread thorns in your way. Such a passion for transient objects brings naught save grief. Give up your fancy for the Rose. It mocks you at every spring and blossoms not for your sake. Your attachment for it is like that of the Dervish in the story I will relate to you."

### THE PRINCESS AND THE DERVISH

A charming princess was the object of universal admiration. One day an ill-starred *Dervish* (mendicant) happened to pass by. He was so struck with her beauty that the piece of bread he was carrying in his hands slipped from his fingers. Greatly amused, the girl burst into laughter and walked off merrily. The *Dervish* was, however, so much enamoured of her smile, scornful though it was, that he could thenceforth think of nothing else but that smile. For seven long years he refused to move from the precincts of

her palace. The attendants and servants of the girl were so much annoyed with him that they resolved one day to take his life. The princess, however, did not wish that the unfortunate man should be injured in any way. She, therefore, whispered to him in secret that if he wished to save his life, he had better leave the place forthwith.

"Have I a life that I should think of saving it?" asked the love-sick man. "On the very day on which you favoured me with a smile, my life was sacrificed to you. But pray, tell me why did you smile that day?"

"Oh, you simpleton," replied the girl. "I laughed because I saw that you had not an iota of sense or reason."

After the Nightingale had been thus admonished by the Hoopoe, the Parrot came forward and pleaded his inability to undertake the journey because he had been imprisoned in a cage, a penalty he had to pay for his beauty. The Peacock urged that he was quite unworthy of the Royal Presence because of the part he had played in the expulsion of Adam from Paradise. The Duck could not do without water, nor the Partridge without mountains. The Huma said he was gifted with the power to confer sovereignty on those over whose head he flew. Why should he give up such a lofty privilege? Similarly, the Falcon could not brook the idea of relinquishing his place of honour on the hand of kings. The Heron wished to stay in the lagoons, and the Owl in the ruins of which he was the undisturbed monarch. Last came the Wagtail with his excuses for his weakness and physical disabilities that made it impossible for him to embark on the journey.\*

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\*It will be understood that these birds represent human beings in different grades of life. The peculiar excuses which each of them put forward are typical of the excuses of divers types of human beings for pursuing worldly pleasures and comforts.

The Hoopoe brushed aside all these pretexts and illustrated her precepts by a series of anecdotes and inspiring stories; for instance, in admonishing the owl, she related the following story, illustrating the fate of those who, like the owl, are attached to their worldly possessions.

### A MISER'S FATE

A miser died, leaving a pot full of coins, buried in a secret place. Some time after his death, his son saw him in a dream. His appearance was completely metamorphosed, so that he looked like a mouse, and streams of tears were flowing from his eyes. In this state of agony he was going round and round the place where the treasure lay buried. "My sire," asked the son, "what has transformed your features thus? Wherefore this deformity?"

"Whosoever's heart is so attached to riches as was mine," replied the father, "will have his face deformed like mine. Therefore, beware, my son. Take a lesson from this."

Sage counsel such as this had its effect. The Hoopoe's words instilled courage and enthusiasm into the hearts of the birds, and they resolved to embark on the journey, perilous though it was. Before starting, however, they asked her to expound to them their relationship with His Majesty the Simurg, a point that was by no means clear to them.

"Know ye then," said the Hoopoe, "that the Simurg once removed the veil from His face, so that it shone resplendent like the sun and cast millions of rays around. By his grace, these rays were turned into birds. We are, therefore, the sparks of the Simurg. When you realize this mystery, your relationship with the Simurg will be as clear to you as day-light. But, beware, my friends, do not reveal this secret to others. It is not a matter to be divulged to all.

Well, now that you have learnt whose reflection or shadow you are, you will understand that to live or to die is one and the same thing for you."

This, however, was a metaphysical subtlety too difficult for the bewildered birds to comprehend. The Hoopoe, therefore, gave an illustration.

### A HANDSOME KING

There was a king, handsome above all other men. His subjects' great desire was to behold his face. Those who merely thought of his beauty lost their senses, while those who succeeded in getting a glimpse of the Royal Presence forthwith gave up their lives. Thus, neither could they endure the sight, nor could they do without it. Out of compassion for them, the king arranged to show his face to them through a mirror, so as to protect them from exposure to the overpowering rays of his beauty. A special palace was, therefore, erected for the purpose, and a mirror was placed in front of it in such a position that if the king turned his face in a particular direction, people were able to see its reflection in the mirror.\*

"If you, my friends," continued the Hoopoe, "desire to see the face of our beloved king Simurg, I will tell you where to look for it. In the mirror of your own heart you will be able to see Him."

This again fired the hearts of the birds with the desire to greet the Simurg. They unanimously resolved to set out in quest of the Great Unknown. At the same time they could not help doubting their capacity to withstand the perils of the journey. Seeing the perturbed state of their mind, the Hoopoe

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\* The beauty of the king stands for "divine splendour". It is one of the Sufi sayings that "if Gnosis were to take visible shape, all who looked therein would die at the sight of its beauty and loveliness and goodness and grace and that everything bright would become dark beside its splendour."

said: "He who has become a lover should never think of his life. Your soul is an obstacle in your way. Sacrifice it. If you are required to sacrifice your faith also, together with your soul, do so by all means, and if anyone brands you as an infidel, tell him that love occupies a position more exalted than religion, and has nothing to do with faith or heresy. Whoever sets his feet firmly in the abiding-place of love transcends the bounds of infidelity and faith as well."

As an illustration of this rather astounding statement, the Hoopoe related to the birds the following

### STORY OF SHAYKH SAN'AN

Shaykh San'an was a saint renowned in Mecca for his devotion and austerities and for his unique knowledge of Sufism. For fifty years he was the acknowledged leader of the learned men of Mecca, and the distinguished preceptor of hundreds of disciples. Such was his personal purity and such were his natural gifts for performing miracles that a single breath of his was sufficient to cure the worst of maladies. For several successive nights this saint saw in a dream that he had gone from Mecca to Byzantium and was there prostrating himself before an idol. He thereupon told his disciples that he apprehended that a serious calamity was awaiting him and that rather than remain in suspense he proposed to proceed to Byzantium in order to obtain a clue to the interpretation of that dream. All his followers, four hundred in number, accompanied him. When they reached their destination they came to a palace, on the tower of which stood a Christian girl. She was endowed with celestial beauty and angelic qualities, and was well versed in spiritual knowledge. On seeing her face, the Shaykh stood rivetted to the ground and lost all that was his. His followers felt greatly embarrassed, but ventured to proffer their

advice to their erstwhile teacher and leader, and even to remonstrate with him for this loss of self-control. Nothing, however, could restore the saint to his senses. They, therefore, did their best to induce him to return to Mecca, but the Shaykh would not budge an inch. He made that street his residence and, mixing with the curs of the street, lived the life of a dog. Misery and illness reduced him to a skeleton, and his saintliness and splendour gave way to infidelity and infamy.

The girl at last came to know of this tragedy. One day she went to the Shaykh and asked, "O holy man, what is the reason for this restlessness and misery? What is the explanation for this strange phenomenon that a pious Muslim should take up his abode in the streets of infidels such as Christians are?"

"You have stolen my heart," said the saint. "Either restore it to me, or accept my love. This love is no mere fancy. Either separate my heart from my body, or lower your head towards mine."

"You should be ashamed of yourself, old fool," said the girl. "At this stage of your life you had better think of your coffin rather than of love for a girl like me."

"Abuse me as much as you may," replied the Shaykh. "That will not affect in the least my attachment to you. Alike are old and young in the path of love. Its impress on the heart of all is the same."

"If that is so," observed the girl, "and if your love is genuine, you must wash your hands clean of Islam. The fancy of one who observes diversity of creed in the realm of love is no more enduring than mere colour (appearance) and smell."

"I am prepared to do whatever you desire and shall perform with all my heart whatever you dictate."

"Then," said the girl, "do these things: prostrate

yourself before an idol; put the Quran in the fire; drink wine and renounce Islam."

The bewildered Shaykh replied: "I can go so far as to persuade myself to drink wine in honour of your beauty, but the other things I can never do."

"Very well," said the girl, "come and drink wine."

To a temple they repaired, where the Shaykh saw a novel assemblage of persons, presided over by a fascinating hostess. Glowing with passion, he took goblet after goblet from the hand of his beloved and lost all sense and reason and attempted to take her in his arms.

"Not yet," said the girl, "you are still a pretender in the path of love. If your attachment is real and firm, follow my ringlets\* in heresy and become a Christian.

The drunken Sufi adopted Christianity.

"Now what more do you want?" he asked. "In my senses I declined to prostrate before an idol, but in this intoxicated condition I have become a worshipper of an idol such as you."

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\* A peculiar Persian expression signifying the loss of a lover's reason in the labyrinth of the ringlets of his mistress. "The story of the curl of the Beloved", says the author of *GulshaniRaz*, "is very long." He, however, explains the mystery in a few charming verses from which the following are selected:

'Ask not of me the story of that knotted curl,  
It is a chain leading mad lovers captive.  
Last night I spoke straightforwardly of that stately form,  
But the tip of the curl replied, "conceal it."  
Thence crookedness prevailed over straightliness  
And the enquirers' path was hoisted away.  
By that curl all hearts are enchained,  
By that curl all souls are borne to and fro.  
A hundred thousand hearts are bound on every side,  
No heart escapes from the yoke thereof.  
If He shakes aside those black curls of His,  
No single infidel is left in the world.  
If He leaves them continually in their place,  
There remains not in the world one faithful soul.'

"You want to be one with me," replied the girl, "but I am a princess. I must have a dowry befitting a princess. Where will you find so much gold and silver? Therefore, take my advice. Recover your senses, forget this passion; be a man, and have patience like a man."

Mortally disappointed, the Shaykh implored her not to be unkind. It was impossible for him, at that stage, to do without her.

"Well then," said the girl, "watch my herd of pigs for a year and I will forego the dowry."

What a position for a Muslim saint, whose religion holds the pig to be the most unclean animal! Yet the infatuated man agreed at once\*.

The Shaykh's disciples returned to Mecca, greatly mortified by the conduct of the God-forsaken saint. They dared not show their faces in public. When they had left for Byzantium, the most devoted disciple of the Shaykh was not in Mecca. He was not, therefore, able to accompany his colleagues, but when he heard from them of the condition to which the Shaykh was reduced, he took them all to task for their inactivity and inconstancy.

"You should have all turned Christians and remained with the Shaykh rather than have deserted him," said he.

"We were prepared to do even that," they replied,

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\* The poet here moralizes in this strain: "Beware, ye hearers, the Shaykh was not the only man whose folly left him grovelling in the mire. Such a danger lurks in everybody's career. These pigs which are symbolical of man's weakness and infatuation for worldly things, will confront you in every path you tread. Especially, when you start on the pilgrimage of Sufism, you will find myriads of similar idols and pigs at every stage, and if you do not wish to be reduced to the pitiable state of the Shaykh, plunge from the commencement into the wilderness of love, kill all the pigs that you have been harbouring in your self and burn the idols that you have installed therein."

"but the Shaykh would not allow us to do so, and he bade us return home."

"In that case," observed the disciple, "you should have knocked unceasingly at the door of the Almighty for his redemption."

Thereupon, they all forthwith proceeded to Byzantium, retired to a sequestered place and for forty days and nights unceasingly offered prayers for the salvation of the holy man. During this interval they touched neither food nor water, nor rested for a moment.

On the dawn following the fortieth night, when the faithful disciple was engaged in his morning prayers, he felt an exquisitely delightful breeze blowing in the direction in which he was standing. The veil before the world was lifted and he saw His Holiness, the Prophet of Islam, approaching him.

The disciple fell on his knees at once and said: "Our Shaykh has lost the way. We beseech you to show him the way."

"O man of supreme courage and lofty spirit," said the Prophet, "let your soul abide in peace. Your leader has been set free from imprisonment. This achievement is due to your magnanimity and earnest efforts. A cloud of dust had arisen between the Shaykh and the Lord Almighty. I have removed it. He is no longer grovelling in darkness, but is now penitent and implores forgiveness for his sins. Rest assured, such is the virtue of penitence that a hundred worlds of sinfulness, standing as an impenetrable barrier between man and his Creator, disappear with a single breath of sincere repentance."

On hearing this, the disciple was filled with delight. He raised a cry of joy and informed his colleagues of the glad tidings.

They started immediately in search of the Shaykh and found him engaged in prayer, radiant as fire and happy in his supplications. On beholding his disciples, he wept most bitterly, tore his garments into tatters and covered his head with dust. His followers said: "O Shaykh, now is the time for thanksgiving, not for lamentation. The night of sorrow has passed; the morn of hope has dawned."

They then related to him how the Prophet had vouchsafed his grace to him, and had bid him be of good cheer for henceforth he was sure to find his way to the Creator in a better light. The Shaykh thereupon put on his *khirka* (Sufi garment), and returned to Mecca.

The story, however, does not end there. The curtain now rises over a novel scene. It is now the turn of the girl to see a dream. She sees the vision of the Sun dropping by her side. In miraculous tones the sun thus spoke to her: "Go after the Shaykh immediately. Adopt his faith and be the dust of his feet. Aye, thou that polluteth him, be pure by his grace. He had not set foot in thy path intentionally and deliberately to win thy love, but thou must go to him with a set purpose. Thou didst mislead him and turn him from the right path. Therefore, be his companion now and go his way. How long wilt thou remain in ignorance? Seek divine knowledge from him and acquire proficiency in the philosophy of Love through him."

The girl awoke from this reverie, profoundly stirred. She commenced weeping and lamenting and set out in search of the saint, not pausing for a moment to think who would point her the way out of the wilderness and give a clue to the whereabouts of the Shaykh. In her grief and supplication to the Almighty, she cried: "O Thou who knowest the truth, it is true that I made thy devotee lose the

Path, but I was ignorant. Punish me not for my folly. Forgive me for all that happened for me and through me."

About the same time the Syaykh had a message from the Unseen World that the girl had abandoned Christianity, and that she should be admitted to the faith of Islam. "Turn back, therefore, and go once more in search of that idol of yours. Be one with her in thought and knowledge."

The Shaykh proceeded forthwith in quest of the girl and once more there was great consternation in the camp of his disciples.

"Oh Shaykh," they expostulated, "is this the end of all your penitence and mortification? Whence again this infatuation?"

The Shaykh, however, explained to them what had happened, and they all set out in search of the girl. They found her lying on the ground, bare-headed bare-footed, wrapped in tatters, and quite insensible. They managed to restore her to her senses, but on seeing the Shaykh, she fell into a swoon. When she recovered her senses, she implored him to initiate her into the faith of Islam. The Shaykh chanted the words of the Quran in her ears. She became restless after this conversion and she felt that the moment of bidding farewell to this world of trial and humiliations had arrived. "Forgive me, O Shaykh," she muttered, and with those words the sun of her existence concealed itself behind the cloud of non-existence. She was a drop of the Ocean of Truth and was merged in the Ocean again.

After the death of the girl, the Shaykh told his pupils that it was impossible for him to live any longer, and he also breathed his last the same day. He was buried by the side of the girl's grave, and from it there sprang up a fountain of pure, transparent water; it keeps the spot green with verdure through-

out the year, and is therefore a place of pilgrimage for people coming from the four corners of the world.\*

When the birds heard this love-story from the lips of the Hoopoe, the flame of their love for the Simurg was rekindled in their hearts a thousandfold. They now cared not for their lives and resolved to set out in search of the Beloved. They had, however, no leader, and a leader was indispensable for such a difficult journey. It was, therefore, decided to determine by lot who should be their guide. Fortunately for them, the honour fell to the lot of the worthiest of them all, and that was the Hoopoe. All of them took an oath of allegiance to her, and they placed a crown upon her head.

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\* This story of the Shaykh, says the poet, must be listened to, not with the ordinary ears of flesh and bone, but with the ear of the heart and the soul. To understand it you must have the powers of penetration of the soul, not the ordinary faculties of comprehension.

**PART II**  
**ON TO THE CITY OF GOD**



## **"ON, TO THE BOUND OF THE WASTE, ON, TO THE CITY OF GOD"**

The march now commenced. The road was, however, so fearful that after they had proceeded a short distance, every one of them began to tremble. They, therefore, halted at a convenient spot. They had serious misgivings as to the result of their adventure, and they felt that unless their doubts and difficulties were overcome, it would be impossible to proceed further. They, therefore, requested the Hoopoe to sit on a throne and answer the questions they wished to put to her. The Hoopoe accordingly took her seat on the royal throne.

A bird then came forward and said to the Hoopoe: "You are just like ourselves, and we are just like you. Nevertheless, you are far ahead of us in the path of the Truth. Why this difference?"

"This blessing is due to the fact that I had a glance from Solomon for a moment," said she. "This position has not been attained by mere devotion and service, or by spending silver and gold. All this good fortune is the result of a favourable glance. You should also spend your life in devotion and await the grace of Solomon. As soon as that grace is vouchsafed to you, you will rise higher than any stage that I can describe to you."

### **SULTAN MAHMUD AND THE ORPHAN LAD**

One day Sultan Mahmud wandered away from his retinue, and saw a boy seated on the bank of a river with a fishing-rod. He had a pale and haggard look.

"Why so pale and sad, little one?" asked Mahmud.

"Sir," said the boy, "we are seven children. Our father is dead and our mother infirm and bed-ridden.

She has not a penny to buy food for us. During the day I try to catch fish, and that forms our meal in the evening."

The king asked for the rod, and offered to give half the spoil to him. The boy consented. Princely fortune now favoured the orphan. They had a haul of a hundred fish that day. The boy wondered what the reason for such extraordinary good luck could be and offered the king half the share of the fish. He, however, bade the lad keep the whole. The next day he sent for the boy and said, "Come now, yesterday we were partners in the fishing enterprise; now I want you to be a partner in my kingdom."

No sooner said than done. Mahmud made over half his territories to the lad. An old acquaintance asked the boy how he had managed to attain that position. "My grief was turned into joy," said he, "because a fortunate man happened to pass by me."

Another bird then submitted that he was very weak, whereas the road was far away and full of obstacles. "In the very first stage of the journey I shall succumb," he said. "Where the most gallant and valiant souls have fallen and are lying in eternal sleep, I can only raise a little dust and shall be forever lost."

"Know thou," said the Hoopoe, "this world is a den of impurities. Why set your heart on it? Why fear death? Each one of us has to die some day. So long as a man is not completely dead to his own self and to the world, his soul does not enter the realms of purity. Therefore, do not, like a woman, bring fresh excuses. Once divine love penetrates the heart of a man, it makes him as brave as a lion, even though he may be as feeble as an ant. How can one who takes a leap into the ocean of adventure accept any drink but the blood of his heart?"

Another bird said, "I am a sinner. Who would

admit such an unworthy creature into the presence of the Simurg?"

"Oh benighted one," replied the Hoopoe, "do not despair. Lower your head in penitence. Pray for divine mercy. If you repent with a sincere heart, you will obtain a thousand keys to open the gate to that path of Divinity. The grace of providence transcends our comprehension."\*

"I am a creature of a vacillating disposition," observed another bird, "at times saintly in thought, at times sinful. Sometimes, I am beside myself in a tavern; sometimes lost in prayer and meditation. At times Satan drags me away from the path of righteousness; at times angels guide and restore me to that path. Such is my pitiful condition."

"Listen to me, you perplexed creature," said the

\* Repentance is the first stage of a Sufi's journey and it marks the commencement of a new life. It is the awakening of the soul from the stupor of heedlessness, making the sinner conscious of his shortcomings. According to the *Kitab-al-Luma'*, the oldest treatise on Sufism, the Path of the Sufi pilgrim consists of the following seven stages, each of which (except the first) is the result of the stage immediately preceding it: (1) Repentance. (2) Abstinence. (3) Renunciation. (4) Poverty. (5) Patience. (6) Trust in God. (7) Satisfaction.

After each of these stages has been traversed, the traveller is raised to the higher planes of consciousness called Gnosis (*ma'rifat*) and the Truth (*haqiqat*) where the seeker (*talib*) becomes the knower or gnostic (*arif*) and realizes that knowledge, knower and known are One.

Repentance is the act of divine grace and only those favoured by Allah can hope to take this preliminary step towards spiritual progress. Some one said to Rabi'ah. "I have committed many sins. If I turn in penitence towards God, will He turn in mercy towards me?"

"No," she replied, "but if He will turn towards thee, thou wilt turn towards Him."

In this stage of repentance the novice is asked to think with remorse of his sins and to atone for them. It is, however, an esoteric doctrine of the Sufis imparted to adepts that real penitence consists in forgetting everything, one's sins included, except God. "The penitent," observes Hajwari, "is a lover of God and the lover of God is in contemplation of God. In contemplation it is not right to remember sin, for the recollection of sin is a veil between God and the devotee."

Hoopoe. "Such is the condition of all in creation. If one would not trip, one would not lower his head in penitence. If all were godly, would there be any room for the prophets?"

Another bird submitted: "My passion is my enemy. This dog of passion never cares for my inclinations and instructions. I know not how to make him subservient to my will."

"This world abounds in millions of slaves of this dog," said the Hoopoe. "He leads them all by the nose. Thousands of these slaves die in disgrace, but this infidel of a dog never dies. Listen to this story".

### A GRAVE-DIGGER'S EXPERIENCE

A man grew grey in the work of digging graves.

"You have spent all your life in excavating the earth," said a man to him. "Pray tell me, did you discover any mystery under the bowels of this earth?"

"I have seen this mystery," he replied. "For three score years and ten the dog of my passion\* saw me incessantly digging graves for frail mortals, but the constant sight of the spectre of death and of heart-rending funerals has not produced the slightest impression on him. He has not been dead or dormant for a moment. Not once has he obeyed the call of reason, not once has he offered a prayer."

Shah Abbas once remarked, "It is possible that myriads of infidels in this world will some day adopt the true faith, but although a hundred thousand and twenty prophets have been sent into this world, so that this faithless dog of passion may either become a Musalman or be annihilated, none has hitherto

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\* *Nafs*, or the lower self, the seat of passion and lust. The most appropriate English equivalent for it is "the flesh". It forms the greatest obstacle in the spiritual path. "Thy worst enemy," said the prophet of Islam, "is thy *nafs*, which is between thy two sides."

succeeded in accomplishing either of the two missions. Under the sway of passion we are all infidels. We have been harbouring an infidel in our own hearts. To destroy that infidel is no easy matter, but he is a true hero who chases him and puts fetters round his hands and feet, and a chain about his neck. The dust under the feet of such a man is infinitely more precious than the blood of others".

Another bird complained, "I am waylaid by Satan (*Iblis*). He haunts me, even while I am engaged in prayers. Tell me how I may be saved from his snares."

"So long as the dog of passion runs in front of you," replied the Hoopoe, "so long will *Iblis* seize you by the throat." Your own desires are your Satan. Subservience to this devil turns this earth into a hell. A foolish man once complained to a Sufi saint that Satan had seduced and waylaid him and had made him miserable. The Sufi told him that Satan had been there only a minute before and had lodged a complaint against the man himself. "What Satan

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\* The *nafs* of Hallaj, it is said, was seen running behind him in the shape of a dog. Several other cases are recorded in which it assumed other material forms. Muhammad ibn Ulyan, a Sufi of great renown, relates that one day something like a young fox came forth from his throat and he learnt only by divine illumination that it was his *nafs* or evil self. He trod on it, but it grew bigger at every kick. He said to this hideous fox, "Other things are destroyed by pain and blows; how is it that thou dost increase thereby?" "Because I was created perverse", it replied. "What gives pain to others is pleasure to me and their pleasure is my pain." Sometimes the evil self appears as a snake or a mouse, sometimes as a wolf or a tiger. Compare Omar Khayyam:

"Man's lusts like house-dogs, still the house distress  
With clamour, barking for mere wantonness.  
Foxes are they and sleep the sleep of hares;  
Crafty as wolves, as tigers merciless."

The mission of the *Sâlik*, or spiritual disciple, is to fight this beast, to purge it of its attributes and to wean it from those things to which it is attached and to make it realise the grossness of its nature and the vileness of its actions. In the words of Tennyson he must

"Move upward, working out the beast,  
And let the ape and tiger die."

told me," said the saint, "was this: 'My jurisdiction extends over the whole world. I have nothing to do with those who withdraw themselves from my domain. Therefore, tell this man to tread in the Path of God, and to wash his hands of the earth. Whoever keeps away from my province has no reason to fear me. Farewell.'"

"I am in love with gold," said another bird. "My desire for wealth is so great that it stands like an idol in my way."

"It is but coloured tinsel," replied the Hoopoe. "You have taken a fancy for it just as a child is enamoured of coloured baubles. Give up such childish fancies, and scatter in all directions whatever you have got. I will tell you a story that will perhaps inspire you to do so."

### A SAINT'S DREAM

A holy man saw in a dream that while he was walking in the path of Truth an angel accosted him.

"Whither are you going?" asked the angel.

"I am on my way to the Royal Presence," was the reply.

"You are engaged in so many wordly affairs," said the angel. "You have taken such a lot of baggage with you, so much wealth and property. How can you hope to be admitted to the Royal Presence with all this paraphernalia?"

"The saint thereupon threw away all the baggage he had, and kept with him only a piece of blanket to protect him from inclement weather and serve as a garment. The next night he saw the angel again in a dream.

"Well, where are you going to-day?"

"To the seat of the Lord of Creation."

"Oh man of wisdom," said the angel, "how can you get there with this piece of blanket? It is a terrible obstacle in your way."

Waking from his dream, the holy man put the blanket in the fire.

On the third night the saint saw the angel once more.

"O pure liver," said the angel, "whither are you going?"

"I am going to the Creator of the Universe."

"O illustrious man," observed the angel, "now that you have stripped yourself of all that you had, remain where you are. You have no need to go anywhere in search of the Creator. He will Himself come to you"\*

Another bird then came forward and said: "I love my country. I have my home on the top of a lovely palace. Securely perched upon it, I feel as happy as a king. Why should I take upon myself the worries and the perils of a journey through wastes and wildernesses? Would any wise man give up the pleasures of paradise and prefer the awful toil and travail of such a journey?"

This babble roused the ire of the Hoopoe.

\* The following story points the same moral. A man dreamed that he saw Malik ibn Dinar and Muhammad ibn Wasi being led into Paradise and that Malik was admitted before his companion. He, however, thought that the latter had a superior claim to this honour and could not understand the justice of such divine dispensation. "Yes," came the divine answer, "but Muhammad ibn Wasi possessed two shirts, whereas Malik had only one, that is the reason why Malik is given precedence".

The Sufi ideal of poverty, however, transcends that of renunciation of worldly goods. It enjoins not only lack of material things, but also lack of all thought or desire for worldly as well as spiritual bliss. No such thought or wish should divert his attention from God. To be detached entirely from the present as well as the future life and to desire nothing except the Lord of the present life and the future life—that is real poverty.

"O mean-spirited, cowardly creature," said he, "are you a dog that you wish to sit on this dung-heap and rot there? Your real palace is in heaven, not on earth. Listen to this story."

### A KING'S PALACE

A king had a magnificent palace built for him. When it was completed, he invited all his courtiers and asked them whether any one of them could discover any defect therein. They were all unanimous in declaring that no one had ever before seen such a flawless and stately mansion. A discordant note was, however, struck by a holy man who happened to be present.

"Allow me to say, Your Majesty," said he, "there is an aperture in this palace, which is a serious defect."

"What balderdash is this!" exclaimed the monarch in a rage. "I have never seen any aperture in it anywhere."

"Yes, Your Majesty," replied the sage; "there is a tiny hole, through which *Izrael*, the Angel of Death, will find his way. If you can manage to fill it up, do so. If not, of what use are your palace and your crown and your throne? The mansion now appears to be as beautiful and lovely as paradise itself, but when the Angel of Death knocks at the door, it will be as dreadful and loathsome as hell."

A love-sick bird then came forward. "My love for my beloved is so strong," said he, "that I cannot live for a moment without seeing her face."

"This is a mere fancy," said the Hoopoe. "It is not real love, born of *ma'rifat* or divine knowledge. Cure thy heart of such a morbid desire for appearances."

Another bird represented that he was terribly afraid of death. "I apprehend," said the bird, "that I shall die of fear during the very first stage of the journey."

The Hoopoe replied, "We are all foredoomed to death. Although you may be enjoying sovereignty all your life, you will have to depart one day. Therefore, renounce the world and prepare for the journey to the realm of non-existence. Do not spoil the chances of Eternal Life for the sake of this mean world."

"Not one of my desires has ever been fulfilled," was the plaint of another bird. "I am, therefore, utterly depressed and heart-sick. I do not think I can undertake this journey."

"Gratification and disappointment of desires pertaining to the transient objects of this world are alike illusory," replied the Hoopoe. "He cannot be said to be alive whose heart is attached to transient things. You have therefore no heart, my friend."

Another bird said, "O light of our eyes, I am ready to carry out the behests of the Lord. Whether He accepts my humble services or not, I am prepared to proffer them to Him."

"Well said," replied the Hoopoe. "There can be no better virtue than this. How can you take your soul to Him, if you carry with you your soul (consciousness of self)? You will be able to take your soul to Him, only if you carry out his behests with your soul, surrendering it absolutely to His will."

"Remember," continued the sage mentor, "such devotion and self-sacrifice are very noble, but there should be no trace of irreverence or want of decorum in such service. I will illustrate what I mean by a story. One day a king presented a robe of honour to one of his attendants. The fool wiped his face, which had been covered with dust, with the sleeve of his robe. A man happened to witness this vulgarity and reported the matter to the king. The attendant was at once beheaded."

"Explain to me, please, the mysteries of negation

and self-annihilation," said another bird. "I hold it unlawful for me to be absorbed in self. Whatever I touch stings me like a scorpion. I have therefore renounced all things, and it is my earnest prayer that I may be able to have a glimpse of the Royal Presence."

"It is not given to all," said the Hoopoe, "to tread this path. The only provisions for the journey in the Path of Truth are total renunciation and self-annihilation. Consume to ashes whatsoever thou hast."

### A FATHER'S LOVE

An old man in Turkestan had two most beloved objects—his swift-footed horse and his son. "I hold nothing dearer than these two," said the old man, "but if anyone informs me that my son is dead, I would present to that person my favourite horse as a thanksgiving for the good news; because, my friend, I see that these two objects are like two idols in my way".\*

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\* We come across several variants of this story in Persian literature. The most typical is that of the monarch saint Ibn Adham. His only son was a child when he left his throne and family under romantic circumstances. When the prince grew up, he yearned to meet his father. With his queen-mother and four thousand attendants the prince set out for the pilgrimage, as his father was in Mecca at that time. When he arrived there, he was informed that his father went daily to the forest to cut wood. The prince next day took the way to the forest and saw the saint carrying a pack of wood on his back to sell it in the Bazaar. The prince's heart was touched. His father also seemed to recognize him. Next day, one of the saint's disciples brought the prince with his mother into the presence of his father. Paternal love surged in his heart. He embraced his son warmly and seated him on his lap and asked him questions concerning his study of the Quran. The prince's answers filled his father's heart with joy. Meanwhile, the people in the district gathered together to witness this strange interview and asked one another, "Now will he leave us and his noble work for the people?" The saint suddenly exclaimed, "O Lord, protect us," and the prince lay dead in his arms. "What has befallen thee, Ibn Adham?" asked the people, stricken with grief. The saint replied, "Divine inspiration came to me and whispered in my heart 'Wouldst thou now claim a selfless love for us?' and I prayed, 'O Lord, if

"Indeed", continued the Hoopoe, "I can think of no better fortune for a valiant man than this that he loses himself from himself."

"O master of foresight," said another bird in great exultation, "although I am frail in body, I carry with me loftiness of spirit in the Path of Truth. Although I cannot boast of much devotion, I can lay claim to more than a little magnanimity."

"Valour alone is the key to the gates of difficulties," observed the Hoopoe. "Whoever possesses a particle of magnanimity eclipses the sun with that small atom. The key to the sovereignty of the world is magnanimity. The wing and feather of the bird of the world is magnanimity. Men of valour cheerfully surrender their soul and body. For years they undergo burning and boiling. The bird of their magnanimity, therefore, approaches the Royal Presence. It passes beyond the region of this world as well as that of faith. If you are not a man of such spirit, move on since you do not belong to the race of the magnanimous."

my love for Thee is not selfless, then part one of us from the other'. The arrow hit my son."

*Cf.* also the following story from the life of Fudayi ibn Iyād: One day Fudayl kissed his child that had seen only four summers.

"Father, do you love me?" asked the child.

"Yes, darling," was the reply.

"How many hearts have you?" asked the prodigy.

"One".

"Then," demanded the child, "how can you love two with one heart?"

Fudayl saw that the child's words were a divine admonition to him that in his love for the little one he had strayed from his devotion to his Master. He, therefore, began to beat his head and repented of his love for the child and thenceforth surrendered his heart solely to God.

*Cf.* also Jami's verses in the *Lawa'ih*:

"Perchance with wealth and sons endowed thou art,  
Yet with all these ere long thou wilt have to part.  
Thrice happy he who gives his heart to One,  
And sets affection on the men of heart".

**SHAYKH AHMED GURI AND SULTAN SANJAR**

Shaykh Ahmed Guri was renowned for his gallantry and intrepidity. One day he sought shelter under a bridge with his followers. By chance Sultan Sanjar happened to pass by the bridge.

"What crowd is there under the bridge?" he asked.

"We are without head or foot," said the saint. "If you regard us as your friends, soon shall we strip you of your sovereignty. If, on the other hand, you are our enemy and not our friend, we shall instantly denounce you as an infidel. Think well of our friendship and our enmity. Set your feet in the realm of either and see yourself disgraced."

Sanjar said: "I am not your man. I am neither your friend nor your enemy. I am going away at once so that my harvest may not be burnt."

The Hoopoe sums up the discourse by adding: "Whoever enters the path with a valiant spirit will command respect like a prince, even though he may be a pauper."

Another bird enquired, "What is the value of justice and fidelity in the supreme court of the Simurg? By the grace of God I am treading in the path of justice, and I have never been faithless to anyone."

"The queen of all virtues is justice," said the Hoopoe. "You will obtain a much richer reward if you act with justice than if you devote your whole life to prayer and prostration. There is, moreover, no deed more valiant than an act of justice."

**A FAITHFUL INFIDEL AND A DECEITFUL CRUSADER**

There was a hand to hand fight between a Muhammadan crusader and a high-minded idolater. The Muhammadan asked for a little respite in order to perform his devotions. After the prayer was over, the fight was renewed. It was then time for the

"infidel" to offer his prayers. There was another interval in the hostilities. The "infidel," who was more righteous than the crusader, selected a quiet corner, took out his idol and prostrated himself before it. When his adversary saw the face of this idol-worshipper laid on the earth, he said to himself, "This is my opportunity." He was about to unsheathe his sword and cut off the head of his enemy, when he heard a voice from the invisible world: "O treacherous man, faithless from head to foot, how beautifully do you keep your faith and carry out your promise! The idolater showed goodness to you, whereas you contemplate evil. Do unto others as you would do to yourself. From the infidel proceeded fidelity to you. Where is your fidelity, if you are really faithful? O Musulman, you have shown yourself to be a non-Musulman. In the path of faith you have lagged behind an infidel."

These words moved the crusader to tears.

"Why do you weep?" asked his antagonist.

"For your sake I am condemned as an infidel," said the soldier.

The idolater raised a cry when he heard what had happened and he began to shed tears. Deeply impressed with the sublimity of Islam, he embraced that religion and burnt his idol.

The moral is that a man may think that his perfidiousness is hidden from human eyes, but the vault of heaven will expose all his wicked thoughts and deeds one after another and dumfound the sinner.

### THE MAGIC CUP OF JOSEPH

When there was famine in Canaan, the brothers of Joseph went to Egypt in the hope of getting some grain from the Governor of the place. Joseph was the Governor and he knew them, but they knew him not. They related to him the story of their misery

and prayed for relief. Joseph's face was hidden under a veil and in front of him there was a wonderful cup. He struck his hand on the cup which gave out a mournful tune.

"Can you make out what the cup says?" Joseph asked his brothers.

"O knower of secrets," they replied, "none of us knows what the cup proclaims."

"I know what it says," said Joseph. "It says that you had a brother, handsome beyond description. His name was Joseph and he surpassed you in virtue."

He then struck his fingers on the cup again and said: "The cup says further that you threw him in a pit. You soaked his shirt in the blood of an animal to lend colour to your story that he had been devoured by a wolf. You thus drowned the heart of his bereaved father in blood".

Once more he put his hand on the cup and said: "The cup adds that you consumed the heart of your father and sold your brother. O faithless men, who would display such conduct towards a brother? Shame on you, infidels. By throwing Joseph in a pit, you all placed yourselves in a ditch of woes."

The wicked brothers were thunderstruck. Tears came into their eyes."

A boastful bird said: "I have renounced everything. I am, therefore, worthy of His love so long as I am alive."

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\* At this stage the poet thus moralises: "Beware, ye hearers of this story. You are in the same predicament as the brothers of Joseph. Were some one to strike the cup for all his life, the story of your transgressions will not come to a finish. Would to God that all your deeds of cruelty and infidelity and perfidy may be recounted to you one by one! I wonder if you would remain in your senses after you hear all the tunes of the cup. O ye, who have remained captive under this vault like a lame ant, how long will you circumvent the cup? Pass on, because it is a basin full of blood. If you remain helpless in the cup, every moment you will hear different sounds. Come out of it and pass on, ye men of discernment, otherwise you will be disgraced by the voice of the cup."

"Such bragging and such pretentiousness do not enable one to be a companion of the Simurg on the heights of Kuh-i-kaf," retorted the Hoopoe. "Do not for a moment boast of your love for Him. What are you? What can you yourself achieve? Whatever takes place proceeds from Him."

"In spite of this rebuke, another irrepressible braggadocio came forward. "I think," said he, "I have acquired perfection. I have also gone through a course of the most difficult austerities and renunciation. Why should I go further than this? My mission in life has already been fulfilled. Is there any one so foolish as he who, seated on treasure, would leave his comfortable seat and go out into wastes and wildernesses in search of treasure?"

"Ah, demon-spirited, conceited fool," exclaimed the Hoopoe, "You have become totally drowned in egotism. The Devil has entered your head. All your perfection and virtues are mere figments of your imagination. As long as you are haunted by such devilish ideas, you will remain far away from the truth. Listen to this story."

### THE ADVICE OF SATAN

One day God Almighty asked Moses to learn some secret from *Iblis* (Satan). Moses went to *Iblis* and requested him to teach him a secret. "Remember this one lesson," said *Iblis*, "Never say 'I'; otherwise you will find yourself in the same condition as I am."\*

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\*There is an analogous epigram in *Hindustani*, pointing the same moral. The sheep cries, "*Main, Main*," which means 'I', 'I' and in consequence falls a prey to the butcher. On the other hand, the nightingale chirps "*Mai na*," "*Mai na*," "Not I, not I", and therefore finds a place in everyone's heart.

Compare Hafiz:

"Sweep off the life of Hafiz as a dream,

Whilst Thou art, none shall hear me say, 'I am'."

Another bird asked, "What shall we do to keep ourselves cheerful during the journey?"

"Be cheerful," replied the Hoopoe, "with the thought of the existence of the Simurg. He whose heart is set on the Lord never dies. How can the angel of Death venture to approach him?"

"What shall we ask of the Simurg when we meet Him?" asked another bird.

This silly question roused the indignation of the Hoopoe. "Oh ignoramus, why should you ask anything of Him? Ask for Him, and Him alone. Listen to this story."

### SULTAN MAHMUD AND AYAZ

One day Sultan Mahmud offered his crown to his favourite slave, Ayaz. All the courtiers were consumed with jealousy. Poor Ayaz began to weep. When he was asked the reason for such grief in the midst of such good fortune, he said, "I have nothing to do with anything but the King. I want him alone, whereas by giving me the crown, he wants to keep me engaged in the affairs of the State and withdraws himself from me. This makes my heart bleed with the thought of separation."

"If you want to know how to adore the Lord", observed the Hoopoe, "learn it from Ayaz."\*

"What shall we proffer at the feet of the Simurg?" was the question of another bird.

"Take that which is not there," was the reply. "There is enough of wisdom there, and enough of mysteries and Divine Knowledge. There is also no lack of devotion shown by the angels to the Lord. There is, however, no trace in that place of the

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\* He only serves God who abandons self and strips himself of all selfish thought concerning the present or future life and worships God for God's sake alone. Whoever worships Him for the sake of any desire—earthly or spiritual—adores himself, not the Lord.

yearning of the heart and the burning of the soul. Therefore, take these two things there.\*

"Oh wise guide of ours," cried a bird, "in this wilderness our eyes have grown dim owing to the hardships of the journey. Pray tell us, how many miles still remain to be traversed?"

"We have to cross seven valleys covered with forests," replied the Hoopoe. "After the seventh valley will be discovered the seat of the Simurg. No one can say how many miles it is from this place, because no one who has gone there has ever returned. All those who have entered this road have gone astray for ever. How can you, then, expect any one to give you any information of the path?"

These are the seven valleys:

The first is the valley of the Quest.

The second of Love.

The third of Knowledge.

The fourth of Independence and Detachment.

The fifth of Unity.

The sixth of Bewilderment and Stupefaction.

The seventh of Poverty and Annihilation.

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\* With this it is pleasing to compare the conundrum propounded by the poet Kabir: "First, I was the giver and I gave my head and soul to the Lord. Now the Lord has been the giver of His bounty in receiving me into His presence. What shall I offer to Him? Whatever I had was given away."



**PART III**  
**THROUGH THE SEVEN VALLEYS**



## THE VALLEY OF THE QUEST

As soon as you set your foot in the first valley, that of the search, thousands of difficulties will assail you unceasingly at every stage. Every moment you will have to go through a hundred tests. The parrot of the sky\* is only a fly in that place. You will have to remain for several years in the valley, and advance with great patience and perseverance. You will have to perform arduous tasks to purify your nature. You will have to give up your riches and renounce all that you have. When you have attained the certitude that you no longer possess anything, you will still have to detach your heart from all that exists. When your heart is thus rescued from perdition, you will witness the serene light of His Divine Majesty, and when it dawns upon your spirit, your spiritual desires will be multiplied a thousandfold.

On the path of the spiritual traveller there ought to be such a fire of desires that countless new vales will then appear, each one more difficult to cross than the rest. Drawn by the ardour of Love, the enthusiastic pilgrim will plunge into these valleys like a mad man, precipitating himself like a moth into the midst of the flame. Impelled by his zeal, he will give himself up to the quest symbolized by this valley. He will ask the Eternal Cup-Bearer to give him a "draught of the wine." After he has taken a few drops of this wine, he will forget both the worlds. Straight will he be submerged in the Ocean of Immensity; his lips will, nevertheless, be dry with the desire of the quest, and of no one else but his own heart can he demand the secret of eternal beauty. In his longing to know this mystery, he will not be afraid of the dragons that threaten to devour him.

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\* The sky that resembles a parrot in colour.

If, at any moment, Faith and Infidelity should be held out to him for a choice, he would seize with alacrity either the one or the other, provided it would show him the path leading to his longed-for goal.

Once the gate is opened, what is faith, and what is infidelity to him? On the other side of the gate there is neither the one nor the other.

### MAJNUN'S SEARCH OF LAYLA

One day Majnun was sifting earth in the middle of a road. A pious man said to him: "Oh Majnun, what are you seeking here?"

"I seek Layla," replied Majnun.

"How can you find Layla here?" said the other. "Could a pearl so pure be found in such rubbish?"

"Well" said Majnun, "I seek her everywhere, so that one day I may find her somewhere."

### MAHMUD AND THE RAG-PICKER

One evening Sultan Mahmud saw a poor man sifting dust in search of some trinkets. Mahmud thereupon threw his diamond wristlet in the heap of dust that the man had collected. Next evening he went to the same place and saw the same man engaged in the same occupation.

"What you obtained yesterday," said the king, who was greatly astonished at the cupidity of the man, "was enough for your maintenance for ten lives, and yet you are grovelling in the dust to-day. Go and enjoy yourself."

"The hidden treasure that I found yesterday," replied the man, "was received from this dust. When fortune smiled on me for knocking at this door, it behoves me that I should devote myself to this work as long as I live."

## THE VALLEY OF LOVE

After the first valley, comes the valley of Love. Whoever sets foot in it, is plunged in fire. Ah, what am I saying? One must oneself be made of fire, otherwise one cannot exist there. The lover, true and sincere, ought, in fact, to be as glowing as fire. His countenance must be radiant with fire, and he must be as ardent and impetuous as a flame of fire.

He must not for a moment think of consequences. He must be ready and willing to fling a hundred worlds into the fire, knowing neither faith nor infidelity, neither doubt nor belief. In this road there is no difference between good and evil. Here neither good nor evil exists. Love transcends both.\* O thou who liveth unmoved by any cares, this discourse can produce no impression on thee! He, in whose heart sincerity abides, stakes all he has, aye, stakes his head itself, to clasp hands with his beloved. Some are content with the promise of to-morrow that is made to them, but this adept demands it in hard cash. If he who enters upon the spiritual Path is not wholly consumed by the fire of love, how can he withstand the sadness which will overwhelm him? So long as you do not consume yourself entirely, how can you hope to be free from sorrow? A fish, thrown ashore by the ocean, will struggle until he gets back into the water.

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\* The same idea is reiterated by the poet in the following passage—

"No rank vainglory for me; I would sooner have pain of love, its longings, its yearnings.

Love's pain is man's sole birthright. Angels feel it although they may not feel love.

Inspid would be the possession of both the worlds if thy heart is rid of love's ecstasy of pain, its yearnings, its hopes.

Let the infidel delight in his infidelity and the beloved in his faith.

An atom of love's anguish would disengage Attar's heart from both.

Then grant me, O Thou, who art my pain's relief,

The pain of Thy love which alone is my life."

In this valley Love is represented by fire, Reason by smoke. When Love bursts into flame, Reason is forthwith dissipated like smoke. Reason cannot co-exist with Love's mania, for Love has nothing whatever to do with human Reason. If ever you attain a clear vision of the unseen world, then only will you be able to realize the source of Love. By the odour of Love every atom in the world is intoxicated. It owes its existence to the existence of Love.

If you possessed the spiritual insight to penetrate the invisible world, the atoms of the visible world would also become unveiled to you, but if you regard these with the eye of intellect, you will never comprehend love as you should. Only one who has gone through the test and has become free can feel this spiritual devotion. You have not acquired such experience. You have not even the inspiration of love.\* You are selfish, dead, so to say, and therefore unworthy of love. He who enters upon this path should have thousands of hearts, fired with devotion, so that every moment he may be able to sacrifice a hundred souls.

### A LOVE-SICK NOBLEMAN

A nobleman had a passion for a young wine-seller. So strong was his attachment that it grew

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\* Love is a divine gift, not anything that can be acquired by human effort without the grace of God. "If the whole universe wished to attract love, it could not. If it made the utmost efforts to repel it, it also could not." Those who love God are those whom He loves. Junaid defined love as the substitution of the qualities of the Beloved for the qualities of the Lover. We must therefore throw off the dross of self if we wish to obtain the pure gold of love. All the love-romances of mystic poetry—the stories of Layla and Majnun, Yusuf and Zulaikha, Salaman and Absal—are allegorical expressions of the soul's passionate longing to be reunited with God.

"On my soul's lute a chord was struck by Love,  
Transmuting all my being into love;  
Agas would not discharge my bounden debt  
Of gratitude for one short hour of love." (Jami, *Lawa'ih*.)

into madness. He left his home and wandered desolate from place to place and the infamy of his life became the subject of gossip far and wide. He sold all that he had and bought wine. When he had nothing left with him, his passion increased a hundredfold. Although he was given as much bread as he desired, he remained always hungry, because he carried off all the bread he received, and bought wine with it. Hungry he always remained, so that he might gulp down in one moment a hundred draughts of wine. One day a man said to him: "O unfortunate man, tell me what is love. Pray, divulge this secret to me."

"Love is this," replied the man, "that thou shouldst sell the merchandise of a hundred worlds to buy wine (the symbol of love). How can a man understand love and its anguish until he has done this?"\*

### MAJNUN'S STRATAGEM

The family of Layla never allowed Majnun to enter their territory even for a moment. In that desert there was a shepherd. Majnun bought of him a sheep-skin. Bending his head he clad himself in that skin and he looked like a sheep. He then told the shepherd: "For the sake of God, let me join the fold of your sheep. Drive the sheep to Layla's dwelling and let me be in the midst so that I may have a glimpse of her face for a moment. Thus Majnun found his way to his beloved. The sight of Layla at first filled his heart with joy, but after a while he fell down unconscious. The shepherd took

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\* The world is a wine-house. The cups are going round eternally and every new-comer has his destined cup handed to him by the divine Cup-bearer. Every cup should reveal to him a new charm in the Cup-bearer until his spirit is intoxicated with these divine love-cups and he loses his "self" in the unconsciousness that supervenes and nothing remains before his mental eye except the supreme beauty of the Cup-bearer. "Let philosophers proclaim", says Sadi, "their sense is the best gift of nature, but those who know Thee claim that the intoxication of Thy love is far sweeter."

him to the plains, threw water on his face and brought him to his senses. After this Majnun was sitting one day in the desert with the shepherds when one of his countrymen saw him and said: "O man of respectable lineage, why art thou without clothing? If thou wilt permit me, I will forthwith bring for thee the garment that thou dost most desire." "No garment," replied Majnun, "is worthy of my beloved and no garment is better for me than a sheep-skin. I desire a skin from a sheep and thus burn wild rue to scare away the evil eye. Satin and brocade for Majnun is skin. He who holds Layla dear wears skin. I have seen the face of my beloved under the skin; how can I put on any garment other than skin?"

## THE VALLEY OF KNOWLEDGE

Another steep Valley now appears. It is the Valley of Mystic Knowledge,\* which has neither a beginning nor an end. To cross this valley you will have to undergo a very, very long and tedious journey. Truly, there is no road like unto that road. However, the temporal traveller is one, the spiritual another. The soul and the body are perpetually in a state of progress or deterioration according to their strength or weakness. The spiritual path is, of necessity, therefore revealed to different people in accordance with their respective faculties. How, for instance, on this path, which was trodden by Abraham, the friend of God, could the feeble spider be the companion of an elephant? The progress of each individual will depend on the degree of perfection that each will have attained, and the approximation of each to

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\*The mystic knowledge which the Sufis strive to obtain is called *ma'rifa*, as distinguished from *ilm* denoting ordinary knowledge. It has been aptly described by Dr. Nicholson in *The Mystics of Islam* as equivalent to the "gnosis" of Hellenistic theosophy, i.e. direct knowledge of God based on revelation or apocalyptic vision. It is not the result of any mental process, but depends entirely on the will and favour of God, who bestows it as a gift from Himself upon those whom He has created with the capacity of receiving it. It is a light of divine grace that flashes into the heart and overwhelms every human faculty in its dazzling beams. A man cannot know God by the senses, for He is immaterial, nor by intellect for He is beyond the horizon of mental eye. Reason never gets beyond the finite. Book-learning fosters conceit and philosophy sees double. Only the heart illumined by faith and divine grace receives immediate knowledge. Hence the Prophet of Islam said: "My earth and my heaven contain Me not, but the heart of my faithful servant containeth Me."

The heart, then, is the mirror in which Divinity is reflected. If we want to have a clear vision of the Divine essence, we should keep this mirror untarnished by sensual impressions and passions. It is by no means an easy thing to do, but God says in the Quran, "Whosoever shall strive for Our sake, We will guide him into Our ways."

Love is the astrolabe of heavenly mysteries. It brings with it the intense conviction born of intuition. The inner light is its own evidence. It needs no external authority, no intellectual power, no articles of faith, no dogma of theology.

the goal will be in accordance with the state of his heart and the strength of his will. Were a gnat to fly with all its might, could it ever equal the impetuosity of the wind? There being thus divers ways of crossing the gulf, no two birds can fly alike. On this path of spiritual knowledge each one finds a different turning. One is taken to an idol, another to the *Mihrab* (a niche in the wall of a mosque, marking the direction of Mecca). One adopts idolatry (Hinduism), whereas the other embraces the faith (Islam). When the sun of knowledge dawns on the horizon of this road, each one receives illumination according to his merit and finds the task assigned to him in the knowledge of the truth. Underneath the ocean of knowledge there are thousands of pearls of wisdom and mystery, but an expert diver is required who will plunge into the water and bring up those pearls.

When those pearls are secured, and the mystery of the essence of existence clearly revealed, the furnace of this earth will be transformed into a flower garden. The adept sees the almond through the envelope of its shell. He no longer beholds himself; he perceives only his Friend. In all that he sees, he beholds His face.\* In every atom he perceives the whole. Under the veil his eyes contemplate mysteries which are a thousandfold as luminous as the sun. But alas! for every one who acquires the knowledge of these mysteries, thousands are lost in

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\*Compare the luminous verses of Jami:

"Creation's book I studied from my youth,  
And every page examined, but in sooth  
I never found therein ought save 'the Truth'  
And attributes that appertain to truth.  
What mean Dimension, Body, Species,  
In Mineral, Plant, Animal degrees?  
'The Truth' is single, but His modes beget  
All these imaginary entities".

the search! One must be perfect indeed if his ambition is to accomplish this perilous journey and to dive deep into the stormy waters. When one feels a real longing to probe these mysteries, every moment will renew his thirst for knowledge. He will be verily consumed with the desire to penetrate these secrets, and will offer himself for sacrifice a thousand times over to attain the object.

Even when you reach the glorious throne, never cease for a moment to pronounce these words of the Quran: "Is there any more?" Plunge headlong into the Ocean of Knowledge, or at least sprinkle the dust of the road upon your head.

As for you, who are asleep (and I cannot congratulate you on it), why do you not go in mourning? If you cannot have the bliss of being united with the object of your affection, rise and at least put on mourning for separation from Him.

Ye who have not yet beheld the beauty of your Beloved, do not remain seated any longer; rise and go in search of this mystery. You should be ashamed of yourself if you do not know how to set out. How long will you remain like a donkey without a bridle?

### THE MAN OF STONE

On a mountain in China there stands a man of stone, from whose eyes streams of tears flow day and night without respite. If only a drop of those tears were to become vapour and mix with the clouds, till Doomsday you would have no rain on this earth except the rain of sorrow. This man of stone is, in reality, knowledge or divine wisdom. If you have to go as far as China to find it, go there and look for it.

In the hands of indifferent persons knowledge has become as hard to handle as stone. How long will it be misunderstood? This inn of toil (this earth) is altogether enveloped in darkness, but

knowledge shines in it like a lantern to show the road. Indeed, the guide of your soul in this darkness is this soul-kindling gem of knowledge. In these dark regions which have neither a beginning nor an end you have remained, like Alexander, without a guide. Even if you have collected these precious stones in large numbers, you will regret that you did not collect more. If, on the other hand, you do not avail yourself of the opportunity to gather these precious gems, you shall be still more penitent. Whether you possess this gem or do not possess it, I shall find you always a prey to grief.

The visible and the invisible world are lost in the soul. The soul is hidden from and lost in the body and the body from the soul. When you come out of this maze, you will find the proper place for a man. If you will reach this particular place, you will acquire in a single moment the knowledge of hundreds of mysteries, but woe to you, if you lag behind in this road! You will lose yourself totally in the path of grief. Do not sleep in the night and do not eat anything during the day. Then, perhaps, the desire for this quest will be kindled in you. Seek until you lose yourself in the search and you lose even the idea of the search!

### **THE BELOVED WHO FOUND HER LOVER IN THE ARMS OF MORPHEUS**

A lover oppressed by the anguish of love was sleeping on the earth. His beloved happened to pass by and saw him unconscious. She wrote a letter to him in such terms as he deserved and tied it to the sleeve of his garment. When the lover awoke and read the letter, his heart shed tears of blood. This was the message: "O man of sloth, arise. If you are a merchant, seek silver and gold. If you are a devotee, then be alive and awake and offer prayers throughout the night till the dawn and behave like a faithful servant. If perchance you are a lover, then

be ashamed of yourself. What business has sleep with the eyes of a lover? A true lover measures the wind during the day and counts the stars and measures the moon during the night. Since you are neither this nor that, O undeserving man, do not boast of your love for me. If a lover sleeps anywhere except in his coffin, I regard him as a lover only of himself. When you have entered the path of love out of ignorance, sleep becomes you, O worthless man."

### A LOVE-SICK SENTINEL

A watchman was afflicted with love. Day and night he was restless and sleepless. A friend advised him to sleep awhile. "The function of love has been added to the office of the watchman," he answered. "How can a man sleep who is charged with these two missions? How can sleep become a watchman, especially one who is a lover? How can I sleep even for a moment? Sleep is not a thing that can be borrowed from another. Every night love sits sentinel on the sentinel and tests his fidelity. For a watchman there is no sleep. For a lover's face there is no water but the water of his eyes. Sleeplessness is the badge of a sentry. Dishonour is the mark of a lover. When from the place of sleep (the eyes) water flows ceaselessly, how can sleep find its way there?"

Slumber not, O man, if you are a seeker of truth and a man of deeds. Sleep is good for you, only if you are a man of words. Keep watch in the lane of thy heart, because there are countless thieves in this neighbourhood. Guard the evil of thy heart from these brigands. When you acquire the art of guarding this precious gem, you will soon be blest with divine love and wisdom. In this ocean of blood divine knowledge will undoubtedly be attained by man through watchfulness. He who suffers the most from sleeplessness carries a wakeful heart when he reaches the Divine Presence.

**SULTAN MAHMUD AND THE FANATIC**

One day Sultan Mahmud found himself in a desert where he saw a religious fanatic who had lost his heart. His head was bowed with grief and his back bent under the weight of the awful burden of his sorrow.

"Away with thee," said the man, when he saw the king, "or I will give thee a hundred blows. Away, I tell thee! Thou art not a king, but a man of wicked feelings. Thou art faithless towards the Creator."

"Call me not unfaithful," begged Mahmud, "speak to me in becoming manner, not otherwise."

"Did'st thou but know, thou ignorant creature," replied the fanatic, "whence thou hast fallen into this bog of the senses through thy estrangement from God, the ashes and the earth would not suffice for thee and thou wouldst throw fire unceasingly and unsparingly on thy head."

## THE VALLEY OF DETACHMENT

Next comes the valley where there is neither the ambition to possess anything, nor the spiritual desire to fathom divine mysteries. Complete detachment from the world, which in this place is not worth a straw, is the essence of this stage of the journey. In this state of competency of the soul there arises a cold wind so violent and fierce that it devastates a continent in one moment. The seven oceans are reduced to a mere pool of water; the seven planets appear to be but a mere spark; the seven heavens but a corpse; the seven hills but frozen snow. Then behold the wonder which reason cannot comprehend! The ant gains the strength of a hundred elephants, while a hundred caravans perish in the twinkling of an eye. In order that Adam might receive the celestial light, millions of angels clad in green were consumed with sorrow. In order that the most holy Noah might become a carpenter (of God, for making the arc), thousands of creatures were deprived of their life. Thousands of gnats fell upon the army of Nimrod in order that Abraham might be triumphant. Thousands of children were destroyed in order that Moses might see the Lord. Thousands of people were put under the yoke of Christianity, so that Christ might become the confidential possessor of the secrets of God. Millions of souls and hearts were pillaged so that Muhammad might ascend one night to heaven. In this valley neither new nor old has any value. You are free to act or not to act.

Although you see here a whole world on fire, ablaze to its very core, I know that it is no more than a dream. Should myriads of souls be drowned ceaselessly in the boundless deep, it would be like a tiny dew-drop falling into the sea. Were millions of individuals to fall victims to eternal sleep, it would be like an atom disappearing with the shadow in the

sun. Should heaven and earth be split up into minute atoms, take it that a leaf has fallen from a tree. If everything from the fish to the moon were plunged into annihilation, take it that the leg of an ant has been maimed in the bottom of a well. Even though all of a sudden the two worlds were to be obliterated, it would be like the loss of a single grain of sand. If there remained no trace of men or spirits, put up with it as though it were no more than the loss of a rain-drop. Were all forms to vanish from the earth, were not even a single hair of a living being to survive, what is there to fear? In short, if the part as well as the whole were totally obliterated, it would be equivalent to a mere straw disappearing from the face of the earth. Even though the nine Cupolas of the universe were to fall down and disappear in one and the same place, it would be like a drop of water falling in the seven seas.

#### AN ANALOGY FROM ASTROLOGY

You must have seen a learned astrologer placing before him a tablet covered with sand. He draws on it figures and pictures and shows on it the position of the stars and the planets, the heaven as well as the earth. Sometimes he presages from the position of the heavenly bodies and sometimes from the position of the earth. He traces also on this tablet the constellations and the signs of the Zodiac, the rising and the setting of the stars, deduces from them good and bad omens and draws the house of birth or of death. When in consonance with these signs he has prepared the horoscope showing good or ill luck, he sets aside the tablet and scatters the sand. No trace remains of all those drawings and pictures.

The surface of the earth is similar to this tablet. If you do not possess the strength to resist the temptations of this world, go, turn away from it and

sit in a corner. If you have not got the necessary vigour to endure the hardships of this road, were you all stone, you would not weigh one straw.

### THE FLY AND THE BEE-HIVE

A fly was in search of food. She saw a bee-hive in the corner. Intoxicated with the desire for the honey, she cried, "Is there a generous man who would take from me a grain of barley and place me in the midst of the bee-hive? When the tree of union will thus bear fruit, will there be anything sweeter than honey?" A passer-by took pity on her and placed her in the midst of the honey without taking the price for it. When the fly found itself in the midst of the bee-hive, her feet stuck tight in the honey. The more she fretted and struggled to set herself free, the firmer became her fetters. She cried in distress, "Alas! I am killed by violence. For me this honey has proved more bitter than poison. I offered one grain of barley to get it. I now offer ten grains for deliverance from this misery."

"None should remain inactive in this valley for a moment", continued the Hoopoe. "Let none enter it who has not come of age. It is a long time since you have been living a life of ease and ignorance, oh my friend! Your life has been brought to an end without serving any useful purpose; where is another life in which to acquire knowledge? Arise then, cut through this arduous valley and then cut yourself free from your soul and your heart. As long as you do not renounce the one or the other, you will be distracted more and more every moment. Sacrifice your soul and your heart in this road. If not, they will turn you away from the path of Independence."

Too hard a mystery was this to comprehend. The Hoopoe, therefore, concluded his discourse with this anecdote:

A disciple requested his master to favour him with a word of wisdom. "Leave me in peace," said the teacher. "I will tell you nothing, until you wash your face. Of what use the scent of the musk in the midst of filth? Of what avail words of wisdom to the drunken?"

## THE VALLEY OF UNITY

After the Valley of Detachment comes the Valley of Unity, the region in which everything is renounced and everything unified,\* where there is no distinction in number and quality. All who raise their heads in this wilderness draw it from the same collar. Whether you see many individuals in it or a small number, in reality they are but one; as all this group of individuals merely compose only one, this group is complete in its oneness. That which appears to be a unit is not different from that which appears to be a quantity. As the Being of whom I speak is beyond unity and reckoning, withdraw your eyes from death and eternity. There is no place here for death, none for eternity. These two extremities having vanished, cease to speak of them. In fact, as all that is visible is nothing and nothing everything, how can all that we behold be anything but worthless in its origin and unworthy of our attention?

A man asked a Sufi one day to give him some indication of what this world is. "This world full of honour and infamy," said he, "resembles a honeycomb on which are imprinted a hundred colours. If anyone squeezes it in his hands it will become a mere mass of wax. As it is all wax and nothing else, go and rest satisfied that all these colours are also nothing.

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\* "Unification consists," says Jami, "in unifying the heart, that is to say, in purifying it and denuding it of all attachment to all things other than 'The Truth' most glorious, including not only desire and will, but also knowledge and intelligence. In fact, one must quench the desire of everything wished for before and remove from the vision of intelligence all ideas and thoughts and turn the mind away from all things whatsoever, so that there remains no consciousness or thought of anything save 'The Truth' most exalted."

"Oneness, in pilgrim's phraseology,  
Is from concern with 'other' to be free;  
Learn, thou, the highest 'station' of the birds,  
If language of birds be known to thee."

When everything is "one", cease talking of "two".  
Here there is no "I," nor "Thou."

### ADVICE GIVEN TO A SHAYKH BY A WOMAN

An old woman went one day to Abu Ali and offered him a leaf of gold paper.

"Accept this, O Shaykh," she said, "at my hands."

"I have taken a vow not to accept anything from anyone save Allah," replied the holy man.

"Where hast thou learnt to see double?" at once retorted the woman. "Thou art not a man on this path with power to unite or disunite. If you see many objects, are you not squint-eyed? The eye of man does not regard anything as alien in this path. There is neither Ka'bah here nor Pagoda. One ought never to see any other than the Infinite Being and ought not to recognize any one except Him as permanent. One is in Him, by Him, and with Him, and, how strange, one is also away from these three

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\* The secret of Unity is that there is no other being except the Absolute Being. Compare the description given by Shabistari (*Gulshan-i-Raz*):

"But the knower is he that knows the Very Being,  
He that witnesses Absolute Being,  
He recognises no being but the Very Being,  
And being such as his own he gambles clean away.  
Your being is naught but thorns and weeds,  
Cast it all clean away from you.  
Go, sweep out the chamber of your heart,  
Make it ready to be the dwelling-place of the Beloved.  
When you depart out, He will enter in,  
In you, void of yourself, will He display his beauty."

So also Jalal-ud-din:

"There is no 'two' unless you are a worshipper of form:  
Before Him who is without form all becomes one.  
When you regard form, you have two eyes;  
Look on his light, which is single.  
Necessarily the eye, when it falls on one,  
Itself is one; 'two' is out of sight.  
The light of the two eyes cannot be divided  
When a man's eye is fixed upon His Light"

points of contact! Whoever is not lost in the ocean of unity, were he Adam himself, is not a man. Whether one belongs to the good or the wicked, one always possesses the sun of grace within the pale of the invisible world. At last a day will dawn when that sun will take you with him and throw aside the veil which covers it. Know, then, for certain that whoever has found this sun sees neither good nor evil. So long as thou existeth individually, good and evil will exist for thee, but when thou hast merged thyself in the sunlight of the divine essence, all will be love. If thou laggest behind in thy individual existence, thou wilt see a good deal of good and a good deal of evil on the weary road of thy existence. Thou wilt be a slave to individuality so long as thy eyes rest on nothingness, so long as thou hast not been blest with the vision beatific. Would to God thou wert now what thou wast before, devoid of existence as an individual. Wash thyself clean of evil qualities; then go to the earth with the wind in thy hand. Little doth thou know what filth and impurity there is in your body. The serpent and the scorpion are within thee, behind the veil; they are asleep and apparently dead, but touch them ever so lightly and each one of them will exhibit the strength of a hundred dragons. For each of us there is a hell full of serpents. If thou art inactive, they are horribly active. If thou art armed against these unclean beasts and come out victorious in thy struggle with them, thou wilt sleep peacefully on the earth; otherwise these snakes and scorpions will bite thee violently, even under the dust of the grave, until the day of Judgment.”\*

Let us turn once more to the mysterious Valley of Unity. When the spiritual pilgrim enters this valley, he will be lost, because the Real Being will

\* Cf. The injunction of the Prophet of Islam to engage in the “Great-Warfare” against the passions.

become manifest. He will remain silent because the Real Being will speak. His self being obliterated, he will be unable to understand who he is and where he is. What was but a part becomes the whole, or rather it becomes neither part nor whole. It becomes a figure without body or soul. Out of every four things, four things will come forth; and out of every hundred thousand, a hundred thousand. In the school of this wonderful secret you will see thousands of intellects with lips parched for lack of speech. What is reason here? It stands still on the threshold of the gate like an infant born blind and deaf-mute. He who has learnt a little of this secret turns away from the two worlds, but although he does not exist as an individual being, he still exists. Existence or no existence, this man still survives.\* Give up, then, the thought of separation. Lose the thought of being lost. Then wilt thou attain unity.

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\* As the rain-drop absorbed in the ocean is not annihilated but ceases to exist individually, so the disembodied soul becomes indistinguishable from the Universal soul. "It is true," says Dr. Nicholson, "that when Sufi writers translate mystical union into terms of love and marriage, they do not, indeed they cannot, expunge the notion of personality, but such metaphorical phrases are not necessarily inconsistent with a pantheism which excludes all difference. To be united here and now with the World-Soul is the utmost imaginable bliss for souls that love each other on earth!"

Here is Jalal-ud-din Rumi's description of the union:

"Happy the moment when we are seated in the palace, thou and I,  
With two forms and with two figures, but with one soul, thou and I.  
The colours of the grove and the voice of the birds will bestow  
immortality

At the time when we come into the garden, thou and I.

The stars of heaven will come to gaze upon us,

We shall show them the moon itself, thou and I.

Thou and I, individuals no more, shall be mingled in ecstasy,

Joyful and secure from foolish babble, thou and I.

All the bright plumed birds of heaven will devour their hearts  
with envy.

## THE VALLEY OF BEWILDERMENT AND STUPEFACTION

Next comes the Valley of Stupefaction. Here one is a prey to perpetual sadness. Every sigh is like a sword here, and every breath a piteous plaint. Here, alas! one sees blood dropping from the end of every hair, even though it has not been cut. There is lamentation, sorrow and consuming desire. It is at the same time day and night, but it is neither day nor night. There is fire in this place, and one is overcome, burnt and consumed thereby. How, in this bewilderment, will a man be able to set foot in this path? He will be as it were dead with astonishment and will get lost on the road. But he who has the impression of unity engraved in his heart forgets all and forgets himself. Ask him, "Art thou, or art thou not? Hast thou or hast thou not the consciousness of existence? Art thou in the midst, or art thou not? Art thou on the border? Art thou visible or invisible, perishable or immortal? Art thou the one or the other, or neither the one nor the other? Lastly, art thou thou or art thou not thou?" To these questions the poor bewildered soul will reply: "I know absolutely nothing of these things. I know neither this nor that. Nay, I know not myself. I am in love, but I know not with whom. I am neither a Musalman nor an infidel. What am I then? I am not even conscious of my love. My heart is at once both full and void of love."

### A MOTHER'S GRIEF

A mother was weeping over her daughter's grave. On seeing her a passer-by exclaimed: "This woman

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In the place where we shall laugh in such fashion, thou and I.  
This is the greatest wonder, that thou and I, sitting here in the  
same nook,  
Are at this moment both in Iraq and Khorasan, thou and I."

is more fortunate than men are, for she knows what we do not know. She knows from whom it is that she is cut off, and of whom she is deprived and rendered desolate. Happy is he who understands his condition and knows for whom his tears are shed! As for me, grief-stricken and afflicted, how painful is my condition! Day and night I sit and mourn. I know not for whom it is that my tears come forth like rain. So great is my grief that I do not even know whom I have lost, and for whom this terrible suffering. This woman has the advantage over thousands such as I am, because she has found the secret of the being she has lost. It is a pity that I have not found the secret, and my blood is shed with my grief and I perish in bewilderment. In such a place where there is no trace of the heart—nay the place itself has become invisible—reason has let go the reins and I can no longer find the gate to the dwelling-place of thought. Whoever arrives in this place will lose his head in it. He will find no gate to this four-walled enclosure. Should, however, anyone succeed in finding the path, he would immediately discover the whole of the secret he seeks."

### THE LOST KEY

A Sufi once heard a man saying, "I have lost a key. Has any one found it anywhere? The door of my house is shut and I am without shelter in the street. If the door remains closed, what shall I do? I shall be for ever miserable. What shall I do?"

"Who wishes you to be miserable?" asked the Sufi. "Since you know where the door is, go and stay near it, even though it be closed. If you sit near it for a long time, there is no doubt that some one will open it for you. Your condition is not so bad as mine. My soul is consumed in stupefaction. Of the

enigma that bewilders me there is no solution. There is neither a door nor a key for me."

Would to God the Sufi could set out in all haste and find the door either open or closed! None can know, none can even imagine, the real state of things. To the man who asks, "What shall I do?", reply "Do not do what you have done. Do not behave as you have behaved up to this moment."

Whoever enters the Valley of Bewilderment finds himself at every moment in a state of grief. How long shall I endure this affliction? Others have lost the way in this wilderness, how shall I get a clue to the road? I do not know it, but would to God I knew it. Aye, if I knew it, I should be in a state of stupefaction. Here, the cause for a man's complaint is the source of thanksgiving. Infidelity has become faith and faith infidelity.

## THE VALLEY OF POVERTY AND ANNIHILATION

Last comes the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation. How can one describe this steepest of steep Valleys? The essential features of this valley are forgetfulness, dumbness, deafness and distraction. Here, under a single ray of the spiritual sun, you see countless shadows that surrounded you vanish. When the ocean of immensity begins to ruffle its waves, how can the shapes traced upon its surface endure? Both the worlds are no more than the forms which you see on the surface of the ocean. Whoever disputes this statement is labouring under a hallucination. He whose heart is lost in this ocean is lost for ever, and reposes there in peace. In these quiet waters he finds nothing but oblivion. If it be ever permitted to him to return from this oblivion, he will understand what is creation, and many a secret will then be divulged to him. As soon as experienced travellers in the spiritual path and tried men of action entered the realm of love, they went astray at the very first step. Of what use then was talking of this road since none of them was able to take the second step? They were all annihilated at the first step, whether they belonged to the mineral kingdom or were worthy descendants of Adam. Aloes and firewood are both equally reduced to cinders when put on the fire. In appearance they look like one and the same substance, and yet their qualities are quite different. Were an unclean object to fall into an ocean of rosewater, it would still remain impure by reason of its innate qualities. On the other hand, if something pure were to fall into this ocean, it would lose its individual existence and be identified with the motion of the ocean's waves. Ceasing to exist separately, it would thenceforward remain beautiful. It exists not and

yet exists. What is this mystery? It is beyond reason to comprehend.

In this stage of the pilgrim's journey, the movement of the traveller and the motion of the ocean are the same. He is and he is not. How can that be? Who can explain this mystery? The mind cannot conceive it. In order that you may understand it, it is essential that not one hair of self shall remain with you, otherwise the seven hells will be filled with this one hair (one thought of self-consciousness).

### NASIR-UD-DIN TUSI'S ADVICE TO HIS DISCIPLE

One night the famous saint of Tus, that ocean of spiritual secrets, said to his disciple: "Melt perpetually. If in the path of love you waste away continually, your body will through weakness become as thin as a hair and then you can easily find a place in the ringlets of your beloved. Whoever becomes a hair in search of his beloved, doubtless becomes one of the hairs of the beloved. If you are gifted with spiritual insight, penetrate this mystery of hair in hair. If of your self even a tip of a hair remains, seven hells will be filled with that sin of yours."

He who renounces the world to tread this path finds death. When he loses all consciousness of death, he attains immortality.\* O my heart, if you feel bewildered, cross the narrow bridge over the burning fire. Do not give yourself up to grief, because the oil in the lamp, while burning, produces a smoke as black as an old raven. When the oil has been consumed by fire, it transcends the grossness of its existence. If you seek to arrive at this place and to attain this lofty position, strip yourself of your self first and take a passport to the world of nothingness. Throw the sheet of nothingness over

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\* Dying to self is living in God. The mystic's sole aim and desire should, therefore, be to die before he dies.

your head and cover your body with the robe of non-existence. Put your feet in the stirrup of renunciation and give reins to the horse of aimlessness towards the place where there is nothing. If you possess even the end of a hair of this world, you cannot hope to have any news of the other world. Clothe yourself in the garment of nothingness and drink the cup of annihilation. In this topsyturvy world, put round your waist the girdle of nothingness.

He who tears himself away from himself attains fidelity. He who is annihilated in annihilation forgets that he is annihilated, is not conscious even of annihilation, enters Eternity and lives everlastingly.\* "When I saw the rays of that sun, I was swept out of existence. Water flew back to water.†"

### THE ASSEMBLAGE OF BUTTERFLIES IN SEARCH OF THE CANDLE

One evening the butterflies of the world gathered together, each one impelled by the desire to set out in quest of the candle. They knew nothing of the object of their desire, so they all thought it would be a good thing if any one of them could try and bring them news of the candle. One of them, therefore, proceeded to a distant castle and beheld within it the light of a candle. It then returned and opened out before the others the album of its impressions and attempted to give a description of the candle according to the measure of its intelligence. Their

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\* The last and the best stage of the Sufi's journey is to be effaced from effacement. If the thought that he is effaced from self occurs to him it is, (says Ghazali) a blemish.

† The Sufi pilgrim first accomplishes "the journey to God", which ends in absorption (*fanā*) and abiding life in God (*baqā*). He then travels down again to the phenomenal existence in the "journey from God along with God" and is conscious that he is unity in plurality (Whinfield, *Gulshan-i-Raz*).

sage leader, however, said that the explorer had come back without an adequate idea of the nature of the candle. Another butterfly thereupon started on the mission. Approaching the candle, it touched the flame with its wings for a moment. The candle was victorious, and the butterfly was completely vanquished and singed. Returning to its friends, it tried to explain the mystery to them. The wise butterfly again interposed and said: "Your explanation is not more accurate than that given by the previous explorer." Another butterfly thereupon sprang forward, intoxicated with love, and flung itself with violence into the flame of the candle. Putting its hands (front feet) round the neck of the flame, it lost itself completely in the flame. When the fire spread over its whole body, all its limbs turned red like the flame. When the wise butterfly witnessed this sight from a distance, it said: "What can any one know of this mystery? He alone knows it and that is all." This one, who lost all trace of itself, knows more than others of this mystery of annihilation. So long as thou dost not forget thy body and soul, how wilt thou know anything of the object of thy love? He who is able to give thee the slightest indication of that object inscribes the letters of his description with the blood of his soul.



**PART IV**  
**RECEPTION AT THE ROYAL COURT**



## RECEPTION AT THE ROYAL COURT

When the birds heard this account of the difficulties in their way, they realised that the burden of their mission was too heavy for their tiny shoulders, a mere handful of bones as they were. Their souls became restless and many gave up their lives in the very first stage. The rest advanced with patience and courage, and continued their march for years. Several died on the way; others were drowned in the sea; others, again, sacrificed their souls on the summit of the mountains; several were roasted by the heat of the sun, several fell victims to the jackals and tigers in the wilderness. A good many died of thirst in the forest; others went mad with hunger and committed suicide. Some lagged behind, disabled by fatigue or wounds; others could not move forward, dazed by the wonders and mysteries of the path. Some were enchanted by the charming scenery, and began to enjoy themselves, forgetting that they were out in quest of the Simurg. Thus, of the millions who had set out upon the quest, only thirty birds succeeded in completing the journey and reaching the palace of the Simurg. Weary and worn, they were without feathers, without hair, full of pain and agony. Heart-broken, soul-stricken, they reached the seat of the sovereign. They beheld His Majesty without form or quality and beyond the reach of human intellect or understanding. Then flashed the lightning of independence and a hundred worlds were consumed in one instant. Dazed and perplexed they saw that in that realm thousands of luminous suns and millions of moons and stars were like a tiny atom of dust. "O, how strange!" they exclaimed, "when even the sun is like an obscure atom before

His Majesty, how can we hope to be seen in this place? O, the pity of it! What agonies have we endured during the journey! Here, a hundred skies are like a particle of dust. It makes no difference whether we are here or not."

At last the Honourable Usher of the Royal Court came out of the palace. He saw the birds standing before him without a feather or a hair, utterly travel-stained, crippled and stupefied.

"Who are ye?" he asked. "Where do you come from, and what brings you here? What is the name of your tribe and of what use are you, a handful of bones, to the world?"

"We have come here," said the tiny beings, "because we are anxious to be admitted to the presence of the Simurg and to do Him homage as our king. It is a long, long time since we started on this journey, and only thirty of us have survived out of millions. We have come all the way full of hope that we shall be admitted to the Royal Presence."

The Chamberlain replied: "Whether you exist or do not exist is immaterial to the Sovereign of Eternity. Millions of worlds filled with myriads of creatures are like an ant at the door of the King. What, then, will your place be before Him? Better return, O handful of paupers!"

The unfortunate pilgrims were so disappointed at this reply that they nearly died. They began to weep and lament and said, "If we have not permission to reach the Court of the Simurg, we have no desire to retrace our steps. Will the great King reject us with contempt upon this road? Can such an insult proceed from Him, and if it does, will it not turn into honour?"

So fervent was their grief, so heart-broken their lamentation that they were admitted to the presence of the Sovereign. But, first of all, a register was placed before them, in which every detail of the deeds

that each one of them had done, or had omitted to do, from the beginning to the end, was carefully entered. Seeing this list of transgressions, they were annihilated and sank down in confusion, and their bodies were reduced to dust. After they had been thus completely purged and purified from all earthly elements, their souls were resuscitated by the light of His Majesty. They stood up again, dazed and distracted. In this new life the recollection of their transgressions was completely effaced from their mind. This was *baqā* after *fanā*, immortality after perishability, life after life's loss, eternal existence after extinction.

Now the Sun celestial began to shine forth in front of them, and lo! how great was their surprise! In the reflection of their faces these thirty birds of the earth beheld the face of the Celestial Simurg. When they cast furtive glances towards the Simurg, they perceived that the Simurg was no other than those self-same thirty birds. In utter bewilderment they lost their wits and wondered whether they were their own selves or whether they had been transformed into the Simurg. Then, to themselves they turned their eyes, and wonder of wonders, those self-same birds seemed to be one Simurg! Again, when they gazed at both in a single glance, they were convinced that they and the Simurg formed in reality only one Being. This single Being was the Simurg and the Simurg this Being. That one was this and this one was that. Look where they would, in whatever direction, it was only the Simurg they saw. No one has heard of such a story in the world. Drowned in perplexity, they began to think of this mystery without the faculty of thinking, but finding no solution to the riddle, they besought the Simurg, though no words passed their lips, to explain this mystery and to solve this enigma of *I* and *Thou*.

The Simurg thereupon deigned to vouchsafe this

reply to them: "The Sun of my Majesty is a mirror. Whoever beholds himself in this mirror, sees there his soul and his body, sees himself entire in it. Soul and body see soul and body. Since you, thirty birds, have come here, you find thirty birds in the mirror. Had you been forty or fifty, you would have beheld forty or fifty. Completely transformed though you be after your journey, you see yourselves here as you were before. At the beginning of your journey, you were numerous, but only thirty of you are able to see Me, and what you see is your own selves. How can any frail human being approach my presence? How can an ant's eye be lifted to the Pleiades? Has any one ever seen an insect lifting up an anvil or a gnat seizing an elephant with its teeth? All that you have known and seen is neither that which you have known nor that which you have seen. What you have said or heard is neither this nor that. If you have succeeded in crossing the valley of the spiritual road, if you have been able to do good deeds, you have only acted under compulsion from Me and you have thus been able to see the face of My essence and of My perfections. It is well that you have been able to do this, ye thirty birds. Remain bewildered, impatient and astonished. As for Me, I am more than thirty birds. I am the very essence of the Simurg. Annihilate yourselves in Me joyfully and gloriously so that you find yourselves in Me."

Thereupon the birds lost themselves for ever in the Simurg. The shade thus vanished in the Sun. Neither the traveller remained, nor the guide, nor the path. Finding the Simurg they found themselves and the riddle of *I* and *Thou* was solved.

THE END

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**APPENDIX**  
**A BRIEF MEMOIR OF THE POET**



## FARID-UD-DIN ATTĀR

A few words may be added concerning the author of the Persian text, Muhammad ibn Farid-ud-din Attār, one of the most distinguished poets and philosophers, Sufis and spiritualists, who adorn the pages of Persian literature. He was born in 513 A. H. (1119-20 A. D.) at Kakan, a village near Nishapur, and is said to have lived to the extraordinary age of 114 years.

His father was a respectable druggist (Attār) and in his youth Farid-ud-din followed the same profession. According to Dawlatshah, the famous biographer, Farid-ud-din was sitting one day at his door with a friend when a *dervish*, or religious mendicant, approached the shop. Looking closely into the well-furnished shop and inhaling the sweet scent of the odoriferous drugs and perfumes with which it was loaded, the mendicant heaved a deep sigh and began to shed tears. He was obviously moved by the thought of the transitory state of all earthly prosperity and the instability of human life. Attār, however, mistook the cause of the man's agitation and thought he was simply trying to excite pity to get alms. He therefore asked the dervish to move on. "Yes," said he, "there is nothing to prevent me from leaving your door or indeed from bidding adieu to this world at once. My sole possession in this world is this worn-out garment and I can give it up at any moment, but oh! Attār, I grieve for thee. How, indeed, canst thou ever bring thyself to think of death, casting all these worldly goods behind thee?"

To this story of Dawlatshah the author of *Haft Iqlim* adds an extraordinary denouement. According to this authority, Attār told the *dervish* that he hoped and prayed that he also would die in poverty and

contentment as a *dervish*. "We shall see," said the mendicant, and he placed the wooden bowl that he held in his hand on the ground, laid his head upon it, chanted the name of God and forthwith gave up his life to his Creator.

According to both accounts the result was the same. Attār was deeply moved by the words of the mendicant, gave up his business, renounced all worldly concerns, became a disciple of the famous Shaykh Rukn-ud-din and applied himself assiduously to the study of Sufi philosophy. Within a short time he showed such proficiency in the knowledge of mysticism and such keenness in the observance of its doctrines that he came to be regarded as "the scourge of all idle adepts in Sufism", whilst "his burning zeal in the service of God became a bright lamp for the guidance of the divers for the pearls of truth in the sea of mystic knowledge". He then travelled extensively in the East, visiting Damascus, Egypt, India, and Turkestan, made a pilgrimage to the holy places in Arabia, and acquired the reputation of possessing more knowledge of the Sufi philosophy and of its professors than any contemporary author. Renowned as he was as a poet, he acquired still greater fame by his philosophical and Sufistic writings.

Attār was the most voluminous writer of his age. In the sphere of Sufi poetry he was the successor of the first mystic poet Sanāi and the predecessor of the most distinguished of Sufi poets, Jalal-ud-din Rumi. He composed about 120,000 couplets of poetry, in addition to several prose works. Of these the best known are the *Mantiq-ut-Tayr* (The Conference of the Birds), *Pand Namah* (The Book of Counsel), *Ilahi Namah* (The Book of God), *Asrar Namah* (The Book of Secrets), *Diwan-i-Attār* (A collection of Odes), *Tazkirat-ul-Awliya* (The Memoirs of the Saints) and *Lisan-ul-Ghaib* (The Hidden Voice).

A Sufi being asked to whom he ascribed greater

proficiency in mystic learning, Jalal-ud-din Rumi or Farid-ud-din Attār, replied: "The former, like an eagle, flew up to the height of perfection in the twinkling of an eye; the latter reached the same summit, but it was by crawling slowly and perseveringly like an ant."

The death of this saint was as glorious as was his earthly career. When Attār was 114 years of age, Chengizkhan invaded Persia. Attār fell into the hands of one of the Moghul soldiers, who was about to put him to death, when another Moghul, out of consideration for his age and matchless piety and his resignation in the face of death, offered to purchase his life for a thousand dirhams. The bargain would have been sealed had not Attār, anxious to see the bird of his soul released from its carnal cage, exclaimed; "Do not accept this paltry sum. You may depend upon getting a better offer." After some time, another Moghul approached, and seeing that the old man would not be of much service offered a bag of fodder as his price. "This is my full value", said Attār, "now you may sell me". This enraged the soldier so much that he murdered the sage on the spot. Thus Attār had the supreme gratification of dying a martyr.

When the chief Qazi of Nishapur lost his son, his friends suggested that the resting place of the deceased should be at the foot of Attār's sepulchre so that "the propinquity of the remains of so holy a man might ensure for him a seat in paradise." The Qazi, however, spurned the suggestion to place his son's remains at the feet of a mere reciter of tales and verses. He, therefore, selected another site for the burial. On the following night he saw in a dream Attār's tomb glowing with celestial lights and encircled by the souls of the sanctified. The dead son of the Qazi then appeared on the scene and reproached his father for not allowing him to be interred in the

vicinity of so sanctified a sepulchre, and besought him to transfer his coffin to the sacred spot. The Qazi woke up, distressed and penitent, and placed his son's corpse close to the feet of Attār. He also erected a handsome monument over the Shaykh's grave.

The praise of such a mystic was on every tongue. "Attār", says Jalal-ud-din, "was the soul itself, and Sanā'i its two eyes. I came after both Sanā'i and Attār."

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